

81/73

c

v. 1

The Bancroft Library

University of California • Berkeley



Hope Mendoza Schechter

ACTIVIST IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT, THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY,
AND THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library



Hope Mendoza Schechter

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Women in Politics Oral History Project

Hope Mendoza Schechter

ACTIVIST IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT, THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY,
AND THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

With an Introduction by
Edward Roybal

An Interview Conducted by
Malca Chall
1977-1978

Underwritten by grants from:
National Endowment for the Humanities
Columbia Foundation
Fairtree Foundation

Copy no. 1

Copyright (c) 1980 by the Regents of the University of California

TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Hope Mendoza Schechter

PREFACE	i
INTRODUCTION by Edward Roybal	v
INTERVIEW HISTORY	ix
BRIEF BIOGRAPHY	xi
I FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION OF A FIRST-GENERATION MEXICAN-AMERICAN	1
Parents and Their Backgrounds	1
Esperanza's School Days in Los Angeles: Coping With Poverty and Cultural Differences	5
The Strict Home Environment	9
Personal Commitment to the Mexican-American Community	14
Additional Descriptions of Life at Home	16
Life on Her Own: The Precautions of a Single Woman	19
Returning to School	23
II ORGANIZER AND BUSINESS AGENT: THE INTERNATIONAL LADIES' GARMENT WORKERS UNION, 1945-1956	25
First Job in the Garment Industry: The Sewing Machine	26
Lockheed: The Assembly Line	27
Union Leadership Training, ILGWU	30
Joining the Staff of the ILGWU: Organizing Shop Workers	32
The Littauer Fellowship at Harvard, 1948	34
Business Agent in the Sportswear Division: Discrimination as a Woman	37
Getting a Start in Democratic Party Politics	42
The Union as a Total Life	48
Some Techniques on Organizing the Shop	50
The Hazards on the Picket Line	52
Liaison with Congressman Chet Holifield's Office on Immigration Problems	59
The Unions and the Chavez Ravine Public Housing Issue	63
Women as Officials in Labor Unions	66
The Equal Rights Amendment	68
The Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California at Los Angeles	69

III	ACTIVIST IN THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, 1947-1978	71
	The Community Service Organization	71
	Origins of the Community-Service Organization	76
	Getting Ahead in the Mexican-American Community	81
	Project Head Start	84
	The Youth Opportunities Foundation and Malabar School	88
	The Media in the Mexican-American Community	90
	Problems of Current Immigration	92
	Representation in Government and Politics	93
	Meshing Family, Career, and Political Activities	97
	Establishing a Career as a Court Reporter, 1958	100
	Notable Leaders in the Mexican-American Community	111
	California Governors and the Mexican-American Community	116
IV	ACTIVIST IN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY, 1948-1978	120
	Women in the Democratic Party	120
	The Campaign to Elect Elizabeth Snyder Party Chairman, 1954	121
	Aftermath of a Tough and Bitter Campaign	122
	Treatment as Chairman	125
	The Campaign to Elect Carmen Warschaw Party Chairman, 1966	126
	Accepting Women in the Democratic Party	132
	The Role of the Women's Division	135
	President, Democratic Women's Forum, 1968-1971	137
	Undemocratic Treatment of an Opposing View: The	
	Sam Yorty Campaign, 1969	141
	The Function of the State Central Committee	145
	The Politically Stormy 1960s: The Assassinations	148
	The Democratic National Convention, 1968	150
	Member, National Advisory Council on the Peace Corps, 1964-1968	152
	Member, Steering Committee to Nominate Frank Church, 1976	156
	A Critique of the Caucus Method of Selecting Convention	
	Delegates	158
	Democratic National Conventions: Looking Ahead	161
	The Question of Equality for Women	161
	The Question of Representation of Other Groups in the	
	American Society	163
	The Coming Influence of the Spanish-Speaking Population	164
	TAPE GUIDE	166
	INDEX	167

PREFACE

The following interview is one of a series of tape-recorded memoirs in the California Women Political Leaders Oral History Project. The series has been designed to study the political activities of a representative group of California women who became active in politics during the years between the passage of the woman's suffrage amendment and the current feminist movement--roughly the years between 1920 and 1965. They represent a variety of views: conservative, moderate, liberal, and radical, although most of them worked within the Democratic and Republican parties. They include elected and appointed officials at national, state, and local governmental levels. For many the route to leadership was through the political party--primarily those divisions of the party reserved for women.

Regardless of the ultimate political level attained, these women have all worked in election campaigns on behalf of issues and candidates. They have raised funds, addressed envelopes, rung doorbells, watched polls, staffed offices, given speeches, planned media coverage, and when permitted, helped set policy. While they enjoyed many successes, a few also experienced defeat as candidates for public office.

Their different family and cultural backgrounds, their social attitudes, and their personalities indicate clearly that there is no typical woman political leader; their candid, first-hand observations and their insights about their experiences provide fresh source material for the social and political history of women in the past half century.

In a broader framework their memoirs provide valuable insights into the political process as a whole. The memoirists have thoughtfully discussed details of party organization and the work of the men and women who served the party. They have analysed the process of selecting party leaders and candidates, running campaigns, raising funds, and drafting party platforms, as well as the more subtle aspects of political life such as maintaining harmony and coping with fatigue, frustration, and defeat. Perceived through it all are the pleasures of friendships, struggles, and triumphs in a common cause.

The California Women Political Leaders Oral History Project has been financed by both an outright and a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Matching funds were provided by the Rockefeller Foundation for the Helen Gahagan Douglas component of the project, by the Columbia and Fairtree Foundations, and by individuals who were interested in supporting memoirs of their friends and colleagues. In addition, funds from the California State Legislature--sponsored Knight-Brown Era Governmental History Project made it possible to increase the research and broaden the scope of the interviews in which there was

a meshing of the woman's political career with the topics being studied in the Knight-Brown project. Professors Judith Blake Davis, Albert Lepawsky, and Walton Bean have served as principal investigators during the period July 1975-December 1977 that the project was underway. This series is the second phase of the Women in Politics Oral History Project, the first of which dealt with the experiences of eleven women who had been leaders and rank-and-file workers in the suffrage movement.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons significant in the history of the West and the nation. The Office is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, Director of The Bancroft Library. Interviews were conducted by Amelia R. Fry, Miriam Stein, Gabrielle Morris, Malca Chall, Fern Ingersoll, and Ingrid Scobie.

Malca Chall, Project Director
Women in Politics Oral History Project

Willa Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

15 November 1979
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

CALIFORNIA WOMEN POLITICAL LEADERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

- Frances Mary Albrier, *Determined Advocate for Racial Equality*. 1979, 308 p.
- Odessa Cox, *Challenging the Status Quo: The Twenty-seven Year Campaign for Southwest Junior College*. 1979, 149 p.
- March Fong Eu, *High Achieving Nonconformist in Local and State Government*. 1977, 245 p.
- Jean Wood Fuller, *Organizing Women: Careers in Volunteer Politics and Government Administration*. 1977, 270 p.
- Elizabeth Rudel Gatov, *Grassroots Party Organizer to Treasurer of the United States*. 1978, 412 p.
- Patricia Hitt, *From Precinct Worker to Assistant Secretary of HEW*. 1980, 220 p.
- Kimiko Fujii Kitayama, *Nisei Leader in Democratic Politics and Civic Affairs*. 1979, 110 p.
- Bernice Hubbard May, *A Native Daughter's Leadership in Public Affairs*. Two volumes, 1976, 540 p.
- Hulda Hoover McLean, *A Conservative's Crusades for Good Government*. 1977, 174 p.
- Julia Porter, *Dedicated Democrat and City Planner, 1941-1975*. 1977, 195 p.
- Wanda Sankary, *From Sod House to State House*. 1979, 109 p.
- Hope Mendoza Schechter, *Activist in the Labor Movement, the Democratic Party, and the Mexican-American Community*. 1980, 165 p.
- Vera Schultz, *Ideals and Realities in State and Local Government*. 1977, 272 p.
- Clara Shirpser, *One Woman's Role in Democratic Party Politics: National, State, and Local, 1950-1973*. Two volumes, 1975, 671 p.
- Elizabeth Snyder, *California's First Woman State Party Chairman*. 1977, 199 p.
- Eleanor Wagner, *Independent Political Coalitions: Electoral, Legislative, and Community*. 1977, 166 p.
- Carolyn Wolfe, *Educating for Citizenship: A Career in Community Affairs and the Democratic Party, 1906-1976*. 1978, 254 p.
- Rosalind Wyman, *"It's a Girl:" Three Terms on the Los Angeles City Council, 1953-1965; Three Decades in the Democratic Party, 1948-1979*. 1979, 150 p.

Interviews in Process

Marjorie Benedict, Pauline Davis, Ann Eliaser, Elinor R. Heller, Lucile Hosmer, La Rue McCormick, Emily Pike, Carmen Warschaw, Mildred Younger.

The Helen Gahagan Douglas Component of the California Women Political Leaders
Oral History Project

In four volumes, in process

Volume I: *The Political Campaigns*

Discussion primarily of the 1950 Senate campaign and defeat, in interviews with Tilford E. Dudley, India T. Edwards, Leo Goodman, Kenneth R. Harding, Judge Byron F. Lindsley, Helen Lustig, William Malone, Alvin P. Meyers, and Frank Rogers.

Volume II: *The Congress Years, 1944-1950*

Discussion of organization and staffing; legislation on migrant labor, land, power and water, civilian control of atomic energy, foreign policy, the United Nations, social welfare, and economics, in interviews with Juanita E. Barbee, Rachel S. Bell, Albert S. Cahn, Margery Cahn, Evelyn Chavoor, Lucy Kramer Cohen, Arthur Goldschmidt, Elizabeth Wickenden Goldschmidt, Chester E. Holifield, Charles Hogan, Mary Keyserling, and Philip J. Noel-Baker.

Volume III: *Family, Friends, and the Theater: The Years Before and After Politics*

Discussion of Helen and Melvyn Douglas and their activities at home with their family and among friends, and their work in the theater and movies, in interviews with Fay Bennett, Walter Gahagan, Cornelia C. Palms, Walter R. Pick, and Alis DeSola.

Volume IV: *Congresswoman, Actress, and Opera Singer*

Helen Gahagan Douglas discusses her background and childhood; Barnard College education; Broadway, theater and opera years; early political organization and Democratic party work; the congressional campaigns, supporters; home and office in Washington; issues during the Congress years, 1944-50; the 1950 Senate campaign against Richard M. Nixon, and aftermath; women and independence; occupations since 1950; speaking engagements, travel to Russia, South America, Liberia inauguration, civic activities, life in Vermont.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the political development of the Mexican American people in Southern California is a rich and complex one. Decades before this nation became conscious of the political potential of this country's Hispanic population, Mexican American political movements were active in barrios and communities of East and Central Los Angeles.

I've been fortunate in having been associated with individuals, such as Hope Mendoza Schechter that have been active in these movements. It has been people like her, along with many others, who have made possible the development, albeit too slow, of the growing Hispanic political presence at all levels of government in this nation.

From the perspective of the 1980s it is at times difficult to realize what the situation facing Americans of Mexican descent was in Southern California in the 1940s. Too often people forget that Mexican Americans suffered the burdens of discrimination in the Southwest. Few realize that segregation in schools and in housing, and discrimination in the fields of employment, both private and public, were present and pervasive in the Southwest in the 1940s towards Mexican Americans.

Realization of this discrimination among all Hispanics was heightened after the end of World War II. Although Mexican Americans as a group received more Medals of Honor in World War II than any other ethnic group, many of the returning veterans were subjected to overt discrimination. It wasn't long before the returning soldiers of Mexican American descent realized that while they were good enough to die in Europe, Africa, and all over the Pacific, they were not good enough to live like other Americans in their own land. Incidents of discrimination, such as refusal of burial of Hispanic soldiers in "Anglo" cemeteries, received national press attention in the years after the end of the war. It's no surprise that many Mexican American organizations in the 1940s and early '50s had as their membership nucleus these returning veterans. In Southern California, one such organization, the Community Service Organization (CSO) was central to Mexican American politics in Los Angeles during this period.

The genesis of CSO began after my first campaign for the Los Angeles City Council in 1947. I was narrowly defeated for the nomination by a margin of 375 votes. On the Tuesday following my defeat, members of my campaign met for a post mortem session to evaluate what we had done right and, more importantly, what had gone wrong. Interestingly, only men attended that first meeting. It was quickly decided that women should be a part of an evaluation session and another meeting was then called. One of the women present at that meeting was Hope Mendoza, a bright young woman who had gained both experience in labor relations and an understanding of human values in the picket lines of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. She and many other women became an integral part of CSO from its very beginning.

While part of the impetus for the establishment of CSO were the observations developed during my campaign concerning the community's disorganization and low voter turnout, another critical factor was the then pervasive and widespread issue of discrimination against persons of Mexican descent. It was the constant humiliating rejection that we as Americans of Mexican descent continued to experience from the majority community that served as the motivating force for CSO's organization. CSO's goals clearly reflect this since its objectives were to:

- 1) Fight for equal rights and promote the best interests of the Mexican American
- 2) Register our people to vote on a door-to-door basis
- 3) Get out the vote on election day by door-to-door and telephone contact

The establishment of CSO was aided immeasurably by Saul Alinsky. I can still remember his calling me by phone after the city council loss and saying, "What are you going to do now?" About four months later Saul Alinsky came to see what we in the CSO were doing. He was so impressed that he enlisted the help of Senill Ostrow, who organized the fund-raising campaign that enabled Fred Ross, from the Industrial Areas Foundation, to devote his full staff time to the promotion and maintenance of CSO.

I think many don't realize how important CSO was to the community back in the late 1940s and early '50s. Membership in CSO grew to approximately 1800 and it was common to have 500-600 people attend CSO's weekly meetings. CSO had an active committee structure with two of its most prominent committees being the Civil Rights Committee to fight against discrimination and the Voter Registration Committee. The committee concerned with discrimination served as one of the focal points for CSO's reason to exist and women like Hope Mendoza Schechter actively participated in fighting discrimination in employment, education, and housing. For example, houses to be purchased under the GI Bill were being built by the thousands, but not sold to "Mexicans." Public housing in our own neighborhoods was segregated and obstacles were placed in the way of ex-GIs of Mexican descent who sought enrollment in institutions of higher education. In employment, the Mexican American was the last hired and first fired--if hired at all.

CSO experienced unprecedented success during its first two years with victories against discrimination in housing and education. The 124 registrars of the Voter Registration Committee--made up mostly of women--did a superlative job of registering residents in the East Side. More than 13,000 voters were registered and 90 percent of them had Spanish surnames. This factor, along with the support of individuals such as Hope Mendoza Schechter, the unions, and other community leaders, became the backbone of the Roybal Campaign Committee, which enabled me to become the first Mexican American city councilman from the city of Los Angeles in more than eighty-five years. Roger Johnson

managed the campaign and Fred Ross led the CSO in a most successful "get out the vote drive" that resulted in getting to the polls over 95 percent of those whom they previously registered. CSO, of course, continued, and is now a social service agency in Los Angeles with one of the longest histories of providing uninterrupted service to the community.

The Bloody Christmas Affair: I've repeatedly stressed that the type of discrimination practiced against people of Mexican descent in Southern California in the 1950s would not be believed today. The "Bloody Christmas" incident typifies this type of overt discrimination. The background on this case is unfortunately still a familiar one. Several teenagers of Mexican descent were picked up by Los Angeles police on Christmas Eve, 1951, for disturbing the peace. The police took the youths to jail, where they took turns beating them up throughout the night. As it later turned out, there was evidence that the officers had been drinking.

With very strong backing by the CSO, I as a city councilman, protested these actions. This was my first confrontation with Los Angeles Chief of Police William H. Parker. In defense of the officers at an overflowing city council hearing, he said: "Mexicans today are not too far removed from the wild Indian tribes of Mexico." To compound this insult, Chief Parker then refused to apologize to the Mexican American community. With the support of Police Commissioner Bruno Newman, the youths were released and more importantly, the officers in the incident were either dismissed or suspended. To me, this incident demonstrated the value of having viable community organizations and elected officials in place. The community's reaction to this event was channeled through my office as well as through CSO. More importantly, the suspension and dismissal of the eight officers involved gave an object lesson to other law enforcement personnel that overt brutality of this nature would not be tolerated by the Los Angeles community.

The Youth Opportunities Foundation: In education, the Mexican American was also active in attempting to improve opportunities for youth. One such effort was the development of the Castro scholarship fund. The Castro fund was set up in honor of Armando Castro after he tried to stop a fight between two teenagers and was himself killed. The money raised by students on behalf of Castro was to go for scholarships. More money was raised after Dr. Helen Bailey, I, and others organized a dance that generated additional funds. These funds were made available to students attending East Los Angeles Community College. The need, however, for scholarships to four-year colleges became increasingly more acute and to this end we managed to get Felix Castro released for a year from private industry. We set up Youth Opportunities Foundation (YOF) and Hope Mendoza Schechter and I were on the original board of directors. YOF throughout the years has provided hundreds of scholarships for youth enrolled in four-year colleges. Like CSO, YOF is still functioning well and continues to provide much needed educational financial assistance.

My Race for Lieutenant Governor: A good indicator of how far our community developed politically during the 1950s is exemplified in my race for lieutenant governor of California in 1954. My race for lieutenant governor

was in large part made possible by having been a Los Angeles city councilman for five years. At the time the California Democratic Council called a statewide convention in 1954 I had received considerable statewide exposure. When the party leadership presented its slate of candidates for statewide offices, the delegates rebelled against their proposed rubber-stamp role. As a result of this rebellion I was literally drafted by the convention. When I spoke before the delegates I told them that while I had not campaigned for the office, that I would run if selected, and that I would abide by their decision on whether to select me as their candidate for lieutenant governor. Well, the party did select me and Hope Mendoza Schechter became part of my campaign committee. Unfortunately, the Democratic slate was running against Republican Goodwin Knight at the height of his popularity. Even though it was a Republican year, I was very pleased to outdraw the Democratic gubernatorial candidate by close to 250,000 votes. I attribute this to two factors: using the voter registration techniques that we developed in the CSO and using the "No Más Por Roybal" ("Vote Only For Roybal") slogan that drew people to the polls.

The events that I've been asked to relate are crucial in the development of our Hispanic community in California and indeed the nation. We all know that changes have come about over the years, yet little credit is given to the important role that persons such as Hope Mendoza Schechter played in that development. These early events and struggles have a bearing on the political development of our community today. I hope that the University of California's oral history projects are successful in recapturing much of what was never covered in the mainstream press and political analysis of that early time. I look forward to reading the efforts of this and other similar studies.

Edward Roybal
United States House of Representatives

7 July 1980
Washington, D.C.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Hope Mendoza Schechter, at an age when many youngsters were concerned more with high school proms and dating, and the shelter and security provided by high school during the troubled 1930s, left school, and went to work in the garment industry, not only to earn money, but to free herself from the ignoble prejudices she had encountered as a Mexican-American throughout her school years in Los Angeles.

It was not long before her keen intelligence, her flair for organization, and her ability to win friends and influence people brought her to the attention of the top staff in Los Angeles of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union and she was hired as an organizer and (later) business agent, in which capacities she worked until 1956. During this period from 1945 to 1956 she attended Harvard as a Littauer Scholar, attended classes in Los Angeles colleges, was a member of the executive board of the Los Angeles Central Labor Council, was a member of the executive committee of the Democratic State Central Committee, and was active in the Community Service Organization and other groups concerned with the needs of the Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles.

After her marriage to Harvey Schechter, she resigned her position with the ILGWU, studied to become a certified shorthand reporter, and went into business for herself. She has continued in many different ways her activities with the Democratic party and the Mexican-American community. The scope of these activities is outlined in the Brief Biography which follows.

The opportunity to ask Hope Schechter to participate in the California Women Political Leaders Oral History Project arose when the National Endowment for the Humanities provided a special matching grant to enable the Regional Oral History Office to extend its political leaders project to include four women from minority ethnic communities who had had significant impact on their own as well as the broader majority community. Matching funds came from the Columbia and Fairtree Foundations.

Mrs. Schechter readily agreed to participate. We had three interview sessions in the evenings, starting at 8:00 p.m., in the Schechter home in Sherman Oaks, a close-in suburb of Los Angeles, in the San Fernando Valley. We always sat in the living room of the comfortable ranch-style home while activities of other members of the family went on in the adjoining kitchen and family room.

When we met first, on January 12, 1977, Mrs. Schechter filled me in on details of her life and brought out an album full of pictures showing some of her activities in the union and the Democratic party. She selected some for inclusion in this volume. After this initial getting-acquainted period, we

began to record the story of her family background and her experiences in school. On March 20 and 21, 1978 we completed the interviews.

Mrs. Schechter talks rapidly, almost as though she were trying to keep up with her stenotype machine as well as with her very active mind, racing ahead with facts and images. In a straightforward manner she discussed interesting details and observations about the labor movement, about the Mexican-American community, and about the Democratic party.

She reviewed the lightly edited transcript between January and April, 1979 checking spelling and dates, completing unfinished sentences, and revising others so that her meaning would at all times be clear. Her close friend and long-time political ally, Congressman Edward Roybal agreed to write the introduction.

This memoir of Hope Mendoza Schechter tells of a woman who moves easily, as an active member of several diverse groups and cultures--social, political, and ethnic--but who has never denied her roots, nor given up on her efforts to assist her fellow Mexican-Americans to move similarly in the mainstream.

Malca Chall
Interviewer-Editor

17 August 1979
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

HOPE MENDOZA SCHECHTER: BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

1921	Born, Miami, Arizona
1922	Moved to Los Angeles
1927-1938	Attended schools, Los Angeles
1938-1942	Worked in garment industry
1942-1945	Assembly line, Lockheed Aircraft
1945-1947	Worked in garment industry and became in-shop organizer for ILGWU
1947-1956	Went on staff of ILGWU as organizer and business agent. In 1954 State representative of Arizona for ILGWU living in Tucson, Arizona.
1947-1955	Liaison, Immigration problems, field office of Congressman Chester Holifield
1948-1955	Community Service Organization, founding member. Grass roots barrio organization to organize Mexican-American people to obtain better services in their communities. Executive board member and chairperson of labor committee, et cetera
1948-1956	Classes in mathematics, sociology, psychology, literature, Los Angeles Community College; University of California at Los Angeles
1948	Littauer Scholar, Harvard University
1950-1956	Executive Board, Central Labor Council, Committee on Political Education (COPE)
1950--	Member, Democratic State Central Committee, served on many committees among them the Credentials Committee; currently on the Rules Committee.
1952-1955	Executive Committee, Dime-a-Day for Democracy

1955	Married Harvey B. Schechter
1956	Graduated from Hollywood High School
1957-1959	Attended Bryan Stenotype School for two years; passed the state exam and became a Certified Shorthand Reporter
1959-1961	Worked as a free lance reporter for different agencies
1961-1973	Established Schechter Deposition Service. Gave it up when husband became ill
1973--	Incorporated as Hope M. Schechter, Inc., and merged firm with Snyder Heathcote, Inc.
1960-1966	Member, board of directors, Council of Mexican-American Affairs; initiated Head Start Programs in the barrio
1964--	Member, board of directors, Mexican-American Youth Opportunities Foundation. The Foundation provides college and university scholarships to Mexican-American young men and women.
1964-1968	Member, National Advisory Council, Peace Corps; appointed by President Lyndon Johnson
1968, 1976	Delegate to Democratic National Conventions; 1976, co-chair Rules Committee
1968-1971	President, Democratic Women's Forum
1976	Steering Committee, Frank Church for President

HONORS AND AWARDS

1965	Belvedere Junior High School Hall of Fame
------	---

I FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION OF A FIRST-GENERATION
MEXICAN-AMERICAN

[Interview 1: January 12, 1977]##

Parents and Their Backgrounds

Chall: You were born, you said, in Miami, Arizona?

Schechter: Yes, July 10, 1921 and I was brought here when I was a year old.

Chall: To Los Angeles?

Schechter: Yes. And I have been here all my life.

Chall: Tell me about why you were born in Miami. Your parents, I assume, were there?

Schechter: My parents came from Mexico. So I'm first generation. My mother never spoke English, and refused to learn English, on the assumption that this was originally part of Mexico and it was stolen, and if they wanted to talk to her they could talk to her in Spanish.

Chall: She was plucky.

Schechter: Yes, she was. She did become a citizen, and fortunately, under the Walter McCarran Act it had one good feature. That was that you could become a citizen in your own native language if you had been here, since, I believe it was, either 1920 or 1923. So that, where before that, they would be sworn in just in English

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 166.

Schechter: and it was just one ceremony, it now would take like three days, because you'd have it in every language imaginable. All they had to learn was the necessary information; that they would ordinarily, to become a citizen, but now in their own language.

Chall: When did she become a citizen?

Schechter: In the fifties.

Chall: I see. So she was in this country a long time before she made a choice.

Schechter: Yes. We finally talked her into it, because, we pointed out that we were American citizens and she had certainly benefited from being in this country. So she finally saw the light, and did become a citizen, and was really very proud of being in the United States.

She was so adamant about never wanting to go back to Mexico, that, when I went to Mexico to visit one time, after ten days I became very ill and they had to fly me out; she had filled me with such dread about Mexico--the poverty--that I began to feel like the walls were closing in on me, and I began to get the feeling they weren't going to let me out. I've never gone back and have really no desire to go back.

Chall: Did your mother come to this country as a very young woman?

Schechter: Yes, she came here when she was in her early teens.

Chall: With her parents?

Schechter: No, she came with her brothers. And her papers read "walked"; they walked across the border into Texas and then came into Arizona.

Chall: To do what?

Schechter: She met my father and married him there.

Chall: Did she come in with her brothers for any reason other than just to come into the United States? Was she planning to work in the fields?

Schechter: She planned to work, not in the fields. She became a domestic and then married.

Chall: Almost immediately?

Schechter: Almost immediately.

Chall: Was your father here at the time your mother arrived?

Schechter: Yes. They had met in Mexico, so they knew each other from the time they were children and then married. But then he deserted her between the time I was born and was a year old--that one-year period. He deserted her and she was pregnant with my other sister; there were three--my older brother, myself, and she was then pregnant. She came to California, so my sister was then born here in California.

Chall: How much older was your brother?

Schechter: He was about fifteen months older than I was.

Chall: What's his name?

Schechter: Ralph. He's now deceased.

Chall: And then there was you, Hope. Were you named Hope?

Schechter: Esperanza. It's registered that way. It's a direct translation. Then Rachel.

Chall: Do you have a large family?

Schechter: Yes, my mother then got a divorce and left the Catholic Church.

Chall: Why?

Schechter: She couldn't get a divorce and remain a Catholic. So she became a Protestant and married my stepfather. We call him father because I've never met my father.

Chall: Is he Mexican, too?

Schechter: Oh, yes. And she married him and they had nine children.

Chall: Was your maiden name his name, or your real father's name? What was it?

Schechter: My real father's name was Celso Acosta. My name was Esperanza Acosta.

Chall: I don't know that you have to go down the list of siblings. But there were nine. They had nine children, and your mother and your father had had three previously.

Schechter: Yes, but the surviving are nine.

- Chall: Your mother sounds like a very special sort of lady.
- Schechter: She passed away two years ago.
- Chall: She would have lots of guts and pluck. What part of Mexico did she come from?
- Schechter: Chihuahua.
- Chall: Did you ever meet any of her family?
- Schechter: Oh yes. Most of them are here. They're all here. I have two uncles who just passed away, the two that she came with. They just passed away this last year within one month--August and September 1976. My aunt, who is the oldest, is still alive and lives in San Pedro. So I have one surviving aunt now.
- Chall: Was your mother the only one in the family who refused to learn English?
- Schechter: My other aunt never has had to, but she never made it a point of wanting to or not wanting to. It was just never necessary. If you live in a ghetto situation there's really no need for it. In Southern California especially, which is the one I'm really more conversant with. Any store you go to has Spanish-speaking personnel; any office you go to has always had Spanish-speaking personnel. Or you take someone with you who is bilingual.

My mother never went any place without one of us, primarily because we were highly protective of her. For example, in 1954, when I went to, I believe it was the first CDC convention, my mother had never been away from the house. Never had stayed in a hotel, primarily because she couldn't afford it.

We drove up with Bill Munnell, who then was an assemblyman--a minority leader and with Susie Clifton, and we stopped in a restaurant to have breakfast. When we walked to the door to pay our bills, my mother came running after us with the money we had left for a tip, because she'd never been in a restaurant and wasn't aware that you tip. She told us that we had left our money. So I had to explain to her, "No, no. That's tip money and that's for the waitress." But she had a religious convention in Fresno which coincided with ours; it was her first convention ever any place, so she and I roomed together during that convention.

- Chall: What did your stepfather do? Did he make a living in Los Angeles?

Schechter: Yes, he did. He worked for Swift Packing Company. All through the Depression he was one of the few who had a job, and while it was on the poverty level we never had to go on welfare. He was able to support us.

Chall: All nine or whatever there were of you then?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Your mother stayed right home. She never worked?

Schechter: She never worked again. He became a citizen. He speaks English fluently. He's self-taught just by reading; he never went to school other than the schooling he had in Mexico. Their emphasis on reading, writing, and arithmetic is very good, so that if you go to the sixth grade it would be the equivalent, if not better, than what we have in the twelfth grade, where you have them graduating without reading ability.

Chall: Your parents had both had that much education?

Esperanza's School Days in Los Angeles: Coping with Poverty and Cultural Differences

Schechter: Yes. They were literate. They could read, they could write. And the reason I speak English without an accent--because even my sisters and brothers all are born and raised in this country and are absolutely fluent, but with an inflexion--our next door neighbors were an Anglo couple. They were the ministers of the church that my mother belonged to.

Chall: Which was that?

Schechter: Protestant. The Fundamentalist holy-roller sect. It was really a fanatic sect. She would have us read the Bible every day for at least an hour or two, in English, and would correct me.

Chall: The minister's wife?

Schechter: Yes. She had adopted a girl who was my age so that the two of us were being jointly tutored by her. I wasn't aware that I was being tutored but apparently I was because I'm one of the few who speaks without an inflexion. The few inflexions I had--some of the rough spots--were taken care of by Sig [Sigmund] Arywitz and Abe Levy, who was the attorney for the union

Schechter: [International Ladies' Garment Workers Union], and is now an attorney here in the city. They did a Pygmalion. If you say the word "accept" in English, the word in Spanish is "aceptar"; so if you listen to a Mexican-American speaking, he will usually say "asept." Siggy was a very, very rigid teacher, and when he caught me saying the word "asept" he said, "You stupid bitch, you don't say 'asept'; you say 'aksept'." And I never forgot it.

Then they introduced me to literature, and the desire to travel, and higher education. I was a high school dropout. I went to the eleventh grade. It was rough going to school without the proper clothes. I remember one winter I didn't have a coat. It was one of our coldest winters and all I had was a little sweater and no money to buy a coat with. So that's when I decided that I would go to work.

I went to work in the garment industry. I became interested in the union because I was working a non-union job. So I brought the girls to the union to talk about joining. The union, as usual, has a very difficult time finding women, who are on the militant side, who are articulate. They then sent me into another shop that was non-union but now under the auspices of a union--not on staff, just as a volunteer with no remuneration. Just helping them. I helped organize in that fashion. They set up leadership training classes in the evening after work, and Siggy insisted that I attend. It was shortly after that that I was asked to come on staff.

Chall: I see. We should back up just a bit then. Where was your family's home?

Schechter: In East Los Angeles. Originally it was 824 North Herbert Avenue in Belvedere.

Chall: Was that a Mexican neighborhood?

Schechter: Yes. That is still completely Mexican-American. There's been an expansion. There's an isolated non-Mexican-American here and there, but other than that, completely Mexican. I went to Hammel Street Elementary School, and it's still there. I then went to Belvedere Junior High School. They now have my picture, along with Carlos Teran who's a superior court judge.

The actor, what's his name, the one that played the Greek? Anthony Quinn. He's also a Belvedere graduate. So we are in their hall of honor, hall of fame. I got my picture because of my appointment by Johnson and being sworn in in the White House. I'm the only woman that they have in their hall of honor. By the

Schechter: time I went to high school, we lived at a cross-roads where you're allowed to go to three schools. I could have gone to Garfield, Roosevelt, or Lincoln High School. I don't know if you know our area here.

Chall: Not too well.

Schechter: So I first went to Garfield and became unhappy there; then I tried Roosevelt. Primarily it was the poverty level that made me so unhappy, because of the comparison between what the other girls were wearing, and my having to take lunch. We couldn't even afford bread so I would take tortillas. The contrast. You'd try to hide the fact that you were eating tortillas instead of a sandwich when everyone else was eating a sandwich.

Chall: At this crossroad, were they economically better-off Mexicans or were they Caucasian groups that were coming in to the schools?

Schechter: Caucasian groups, but also some Mexican-Americans who were a little better off in terms of the clothes they wore, their spending money, this kind of thing.

Chall: How did that come about?

Schechter: Smaller families. I think the smaller family has a lot to do with it. Maybe both parents working. Or the father just having a higher paying job. In our family, we had a baby almost every year. The minute one was weaned, my mother would get pregnant. And I, being the oldest daughter, had to stay out of school two weeks, because, at that time, women were told to stay in bed ten days. So I stayed home and took care of my mother. She always had them at home. The doctor would come to the house because she couldn't afford to go to a hospital. I got so good that the doctor said I should become a nurse.

So when I was in the eighth grade, Mrs. Murphy, our counselor, called me in. She hated Mexican-Americans. In the eighth grade you fill out a form saying whether you're going to go academic or home econ. I put down for an academic course because I knew I needed that for a nursing career.

She called me in and asked me why I had put it on there and I gave her the same explanation I just gave you. I became an expert on how to handle babies and take care of a mother. She said what made me think that anyone who was sick in bed would want anyone as black as me to take care of them. I remember I went out of there crying. I went to my home room and I couldn't go

Schechter: in because I couldn't stop crying. I was gasping loud cries so the home room teacher came out and wanted to know what was wrong. I told her what Mrs. Murphy had said.

Of course, nothing ever happened to Mrs. Murphy, and meantime, I got put back into a home econ course, which may have had something to do with my then lack of desire to continue studying and doing my homework properly. My grades were down in the doldrums. Finally, in the eleventh grade I dropped out.

Chall: Your mother was not a Catholic any longer, but she had no way of understanding that she didn't have to continue to have children every year? Or did she want children at this rate?

Schechter: Even though you may have left, you still have this indoctrination that you had in the past. So there was an absolute refusal to use any kind of a contraceptive or to do anything surgically, such as tying of the tubes, which would have been available to her. As a consequence, she just kept on having babies.

Chall: Did she love her babies?

Schechter: She was too tired. She was just too tired for it. I know I ended up sort of being the drudge, being the oldest. I used to line the children up to give them their baths. My brothers will never forget that I couldn't stand dirt, and to this day can't stand dirt, and I would use Dutch Cleanser on their feet. [laughter]

Chall: Oh! Poor little fellows.

Schechter: They now tease me about using Dutch Cleanser on their feet.

Chall: How much help was Rachel to you? Was she much younger than you?

Schechter: No, like a year and three months younger. But she was really brought up by my stepfather's aunt and my then godmother, who baptised me at a period of time before my mother changed religions. She was brought up by them and so had it a little easier and didn't rejoin our family until she was in her early teens.

Chall: How did that happen?

Schechter: The death of the other two. My stepfather's aunt and my godmother's death.

Chall: Why did she go away from the home?

Schechter: Because of the poverty.

- Chall: I see. Were there any other children who went to other homes?
- Schechter: No. She was the only one. As a matter of fact, there was one minister who was very interested in the fact that I seemed to be an outgoing kind of person, and the church was going to help pay for my education at St. Vincent de Paul. I don't know if you're familiar with that school.
- Chall: I didn't know they had a school.
- Schechter: Yes. This was another minister, not the same one [who lived next door] but one who became interested in our church and would come. I was one of those who was asked to go. Our next door neighbors' daughter went, and I didn't. She subsequently died of tuberculosis, which is one of those diseases that apparently has a high incidence in the Mexican-American community.
- And because I was always very skinny, much skinnier than I am now, every semester I had to go through the test to prove that I wasn't tubercular, to be allowed to enter. Each semester I would have to go through this, and I never had any problem, and it was always a negative kind of a thing. Anyway, that's what happened to Pauline. My mother kept raising obstacles. No clothes; they got me clothes. No shoes; they got me shoes. Finally, on the last day she just said no. So that ended that opportunity for me.
- Chall: Was this a boarding school?
- Schechter: Yes.
- Chall: Was this a Catholic school or a Protestant school? I always thought it was a Catholic institution.
- Schechter: I always thought it was Catholic, too, and this is why I don't understand, other than maybe it was the one chance to get me out of the milieu.

The Strict Home Environment

- Chall: I see. Because it was the Protestant minister who was going to place you there.
- Schechter: I think it was just a question of education and getting me out of that kind of environment. Even though it was a good one in terms of [her] being a strict mother. There were many times when

Schechter: she overdid it. I couldn't wear make-up. I couldn't wear bobby socks. She finally had to relent on gym shorts because it was a requirement of the school. But I never could cut my hair; it was always braided, because the Bible says so. And you don't wear pants. They were all wearing pants, and in the Bible, apparently, in some section it says "No woman shall wear...."

Chall: And she was taking her Bible very seriously then.

Schechter: Literally. Very, very literally. So I learned to put my lipstick on as I would walk out the door. And I can still put on my lipstick without a mirror. So there are some advantages. [laughter] I can understand why blind people can do things so well, because I learned to put it on straighter than some women can, looking in a mirror. Anyway, where are we now?

Chall: I was just trying to get some good background on your family because family background is very important to people who are studying history, particularly women's history. They want it very much. So if I seem to be prying, I don't mean to. I just feel that this is one opportunity to get a good background since we don't have too many Mexican-American women in our oral histories.

Schechter: Another thing is that you don't speak English in the home, at least not in ours. At that time no one ever did in any home. If I tried to, I would get slapped. Then, of course, at that time, they had what they called demerits in school; I don't know what they now call it in school, but at that time that's what we had--demerits. And if I spoke Spanish at school, I got demerits. So you were rather schizo as you grew up, because, on the one hand, they had this stricture of no English in the home and then no Spanish in the school. It was looked down on; it was frowned on.

I had a further handicap in that I was the only one among my peers who was a Protestant, so that I went through school being ridiculed and called "Hallelujah." On Ash Wednesday I would be the only one without the ash. I got many tongue lashings and a few beatings for not being a Catholic, because you just are not acceptable otherwise.

As a matter of fact, this was one of my reasons for rejection of the later offer by the now Cardinal to help me become a Catholic, because I had had such a difficult period during my school years with the Catholic children. I wanted no part of it if they were going to be this rigid and this fanatic. Then, of course, my mother's fanaticism drove me away from her church because I felt that they were so unyielding. There was none of the live-and-let live kind of philosophy that I have grown to adopt.

Schechter: I am very tolerant. I have friends of every race, color, creed, of every religious background, of every economic background, which is part of my union training. I like the person, and if I like the person that is all that really counts. But in my mother's religion, for example, since they had such strict rules about make-up, wearing short skirts, bobby socks where you showed your legs.... I wore these cotton lisle hose, white, all through school.

If they saw me on the street, and I could spot them five blocks away, I would immediately start taking the lipstick off. I don't know if you had this problem where you're trying to hide the fact that you ever wore it. They would walk up to me and split my lips, and right in the cracks you could see a little bit of lipstick residue. And before I got home, my mother would know of it, even though we had no phone because we couldn't afford it.

In fact, when I grew up and started to work for the union, I had still never used a phone, and I was constantly hitting my teeth because I would be picking it up from the wrong end; I hadn't had the background that other children take for granted. When you start late in life, it's an awful instrument to start handling. I remember I had a very big problem trying to use a phone.

Anyway, by the time I got home, she would know about it and I would get a beating. Then, because I was the oldest, if the children did anything wrong, I would get a beating because I should have watched them. This is still tradition. This is still part of the pattern. The oldest always takes the punishment for the younger ones because we are responsible. As the oldest--which is another reason why I may be much stronger than most Mexican-Americans--you will find, male or female, the one who is the oldest is the strongest person. You have to be because you're thrown into that role. By the time I was five, I remember that I had to help do the diapers. Every time I was playing she would always call me in to watch the baby, feed the baby, do the diapers. I was four or five.

My brother decided and I decided one day that who needed this baby. So she [Mother] went to the store and we lit a fire. Then we lived on Gainsboro which is near Indiana, which is the dividing line of the city and the county. We always lived in the county, not the city, of Los Angeles. County is poorer area--no sidewalks, although our street did have sidewalks. Our landlady saw the fire in time. The baby wasn't hurt at all. We used newspapers which immediately create a big fire so it's easily seen and fast. So the baby was saved. I can remember, even at a very early age, the strong resentment of being forced into that kind of position. But now I recognize it, in a way.

Chall: It was the culture.

Schechter: Well, not only that, but it helped me in terms of being a self-reliant kind of person and, later on, in being a leader. I never had any qualms about taking charge because you always had to be in charge.

Chall: When you say you were given a beating, does that really mean a physical beating by your mother?

Schechter: Yes. I, many a time, couldn't dress in gym clothes because she would use the electric iron cord. I don't know if you're aware of it, but the second time around it draws blood. So many times I wouldn't dress for gym because I would be too embarrassed to show the welts. I happen to bruise easily anyway. You have to remember, too, that I had long hair, and she had to braid my hair; even though I could run fast, the one time she'd catch up with me was every morning when she had to braid my hair. So I don't remember a day in my life that I did not have a beating, either for something I did, or something my sisters did, or something my brothers did. Many people, like my husband, look back on a very happy childhood; and I can remember that my getting married was the highlight because it was like the woman who, at forty, sends the last kid off to college. I decided that I didn't want to change another diaper ever again in my whole life; I didn't want to hear another baby cry ever in my whole life. I have no children.

Chall: Oh, you haven't?

Schechter: No. After I got in my early teens and became a little more brave in terms of my way of handling my mother, I was really very harsh. I would say things like, "Pigs and animals have babies." I began to recognize it as the downfall of the whole economic structure in our family, the fact that there were always so many babies. We couldn't even have milk. The babies were the ones who always got milk. You could only afford one quart a day. So we never had really proper nutritional kind of food. Apparently, though, beans and tortillas are very, very nutritious and gave us what we needed.

##

Chall: Was your food at home typically Mexican?

Schechter: Yes. At school, part of the curriculum, part of the rules, was that they wanted to know what we ate at home. I quickly found that if I really put down what I ate at home, I got demerits. They would give me demerits. So I quickly learned to put down orange juice, and cereal, or bacon and eggs--foods that we just

Schechter: never had at home. But if you didn't put it down the way the book said you should put it down, you ended up getting a bad grade in the class, and getting demerits, and being called down to the counselor's office, when it was something that was totally beyond your control. I didn't hold the purse strings. I had no money.

Chall: And your mother, of course, could never be approached because she couldn't speak English.

Schechter: It wouldn't have done her any good. She couldn't afford it.

Chall: That's right. It sounds as if the school system was very harsh with the minorities who didn't fit the culture pattern. They were treated almost like the white man's burden--we have to bring them up to our standards--type of thinking. I can see, in some sense, why this might be done. But, as you look back on it, did it seem the wrong approach? Like eating, for example, giving you demerits for not eating what's considered proper?

Schechter: I can understand that, perhaps, the teacher had certain guidelines by which he had to go and had no leeway. I would say that the administrators who set those kinds of guidelines didn't take into consideration cultural background like eating habits. We were certainly none the worse for wear in terms of what we ate. I think where I really fault them is their insensitivity.

The counselors would refer to the Mexican-Americans as "greasers." You were really a class by yourself. The Anglos were treated differently than were we who were Mexican-American. I say "Anglo" because we are white; if I say I'm white then you assume I'm saying Anglo. I'm saying that the Anglos were not insulted as we were. And I think this is where, now the emphasis on sensitizing teachers has made a great difference. I don't think it even matters what the teacher's racial background is; it matters that they be sensitive persons. We did not have that. We had the misfortune, at that time, of having very intolerant people, which may be one of the reasons that made me swing the other way.

Chall: So, out of this, you say you decided that you just weren't going to have children.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: And you never had any?

Schechter: No.

Chall: Did that create problems with your marriage?

Schechter: No. This was one of the ground rules on my part, and it never did. However, I was limited in courtships because I was a non-Catholic. A non-Catholic Mexican-American was very difficult to find. If you found them, you didn't like them--in my case. So I ended up marrying someone who was not a Mexican-American because I just never had that opportunity.*

Personal Commitment to the Mexican-American Community

Chall: So that took you completely out of your culture.

Schechter: Not completely because I've always maintained my ties. I'm not as active in terms of the total commitment I had before, because I don't have the time; but I was with the Community Service Organization, which was the first organization that helped elect [Edward] Roybal to Congress; I was chairman of the labor committee when I was with them; I helped in every phase. The key to electing Roybal was the voter registration drive that we put on, because he lost the first campaign, not because the people didn't want him, but because they weren't registered. So we put on a very intensive registration drive and he won. He was the first Mexican-American to win office in my lifetime.

Chall: And you worked in the Mexican-American community registering voters?

Schechter: Yes. Then I went on and was on the board of directors of the Community Service Organization and the Council of Mexican-American Affairs. When Project Head Start started, we were in charge of setting up all the Project Head Starts for the Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles County. And, of course, it being a new program, we had to start from scratch finding the personnel, the sites, food kitchens--everything from scratch. We had the good fortune of having on our board Carlos Teran, who was superior court judge and, of course, in that capacity was able to help us legally to keep us within the guidelines--those of us who didn't have legal backgrounds.

*Harvey Schechter is Jewish.

Schechter: We had on our board a realtor, Carlos Samario. He's a very successful realtor who helped us get good locations at a minimum price. So we had a good across-the-board selection of people. I forget the man's name, but he was the one and only Mexican-American psychologist in the state of California. [Montes] So we had a very, very balanced kind of a board.

I am now on the board of directors of the Youth Opportunity Foundation, and we help raise funds for needy Mexican-Americans who go on to higher education. Because of the limitation of funds, we are very frugal with our funds, in terms of selecting only those that we know are going to finish. We can't afford the luxury of someone who is, let's say, a B/C student who falls under 2.50; we try to stay as close to the 3.00 because we can't afford to lose even one. We renew it on an annual basis based on their grades. We haven't had one dropout.

Chall: Do you start them with high school or college?

Schechter: College. But our real interest really is in the Project Head Start because by the time the child reaches seventh grade you have lost them. They're crippled if they cannot read and write in English, they absolutely cannot have learned the basics. So by the time they get to junior high they're already dropouts or they're on their way.

And the only reason they stay in school is because of state law. They leave high school at sixteen now; I think sixteen is the age that they let them go. They still cannot read and they still cannot write. This is why I was so interested in Project Head Start because we were talking about it even before that program started. When the program finally materialized, it was a realization of dreams that we had had.

Chall: There is no more Project Head Start; I guess it has something to do with early education now.

Schechter: Yes. As a matter of fact, I have a sister now who is a teacher's aide out in the Pasadena area, and she says that this semester, for the first time, they have had to start all the way back. Up to now they had had them identifying their alphabet, knowing their alphabet, minimum reading ability, a little arithmetic. All of a sudden this time they didn't even know the crayon colors. So this semester she went into a state of shock when all of a sudden she realized that they knew nothing. She said, "You have no idea. They know nothing." And I know what she's talking about, because I started school without one word of English.

Schechter: We have always taken the position that, for the Mexican community here, English should be treated as a foreign language. This present organization of which I am on the board, for two years we had the luxury of having Malabar School funded federally, where we were able to implement that. The children would start out with Spanish, learning the fundamentals of the different classes--geography, et cetera--with English being taught as a foreign language. And at whatever level they reached competence, they were then switched into completely English class. Not arbitrarily, like now you're in this class at such an age; it was as each child developed to that point, then they were transferred. And that year that was the one school where "Johnny" could read, and we proved our point.

However, the board of education was very unhappy with it because they didn't have it to provide to all the other schools; therefore, if they couldn't provide it for all the other schools, we couldn't have it either, and they fought us at every step of the way on our renewal.

At that time, Bob Finch was the director of HEW [Health, Education and Welfare], and he is related indirectly, so I know him personally. In spite of the fact that the board of education had turned us down, I went to him personally and I asked him to renew it and he did. But then by the next time around, he was already out and there was nothing I could do. So I was able to get funding for one more year because I knew Bob Finch personally.

Chall: Did you say he was related?

Schechter: Yes. My husband's cousin is married to his only sister.

Additional Descriptions of Life at Home

Chall: I see. I want to go back just a little bit to your stepfather and his relationship with your family and your mother. Were they happily married?

Schechter: No, not really. The man is always the head of the family, and I would say that at the level of education and background in the small town they came from, the man beats the wife. He comes home unhappy because the foreman yelled at him and then proceeds to take it out on the wife. Whatever frustrations he met with at work, she would pay for it. Anything wrong in the home, she would pay for it. But this was something that was expected.

Schechter: I mean, this was a way of life. So I would say, no it was not a happy family; however, you don't run and get divorced because economically you can't afford to.

This is my husband. [short interruption for purposes of introducing Harvey Schechter]

Chall: So you grew up in what you would consider a typical Mexican-American family? Would you consider that fairly typical?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: And were you very crowded into a number of small rooms, all ten or eleven of you?

Schechter: Very, very crowded. Yes. We slept on the floor, we slept on the bed; this is why we had at least three to a bed because we were very crowded. We owned our own home; we always have, as small as it was. But we had a very big yard. When I grew up I helped them buy a nice home. So they economically rose and had a nice home. Then Garfield High School decided to expand and, unfortunately, took that home. So then instead of buying an older house, I talked them into buying a new house. For the first time in their lives they moved into a brand new, three-bedroom, two bath, house.

Chall: In the same community?

Schechter: No. They are now in the south San Gabriel area because I found that you could get a better price and a nicer house for the same amount of money.

Chall: This was your mother's home when she was living?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: With a few other members of the family?

Schechter: Yes, there were still some at home. They were very comfortable. They still own the other house at 824 North Herbert Avenue, which was sold to my family by the Protestant minister and his wife who lived next door. For two people who came to this country absolutely without a dime in their pocket, I think that they really achieved everything they ever hoped for.

My stepfather remembers that when he was a child, his dream in life was to own a burro because they had to bring in the wood and he always had to carry it for the wood stove in the house.

- Schechter: His dream was to have a burro; and his owning a car was his realization of his dream; also his owning a home; and the fact that not only does he own his own home but he owns two homes has far surpassed his wildest expectations.
- Chall: But that was because you and the rest of the family helped. He owned his first home on his own?
- Schechter: Yes, and then we were able to help him get the second one and then help him with a third one so that at no point do you have a mortgage. With the second two houses there was no mortgage. We don't believe in mortgages. Just to digress a little bit, are you familiar with the blue lining?
- Chall: The blue lining?
- Schechter: Yes. This is where funds by savings and loans, banks, et cetera....
- Chall: I've heard of red lining.
- Schechter: That's what I meant, red lining. I draw a blank on that because of the red light bit. [laughter] Even though, economically, the Mexican-American is on a par with the black--even though the black has a higher education level in the state of California--the defaults on mortgages in the black community are much higher than in the Mexican-American community; so that even though, economically, you can classify them equally, the banks do not red-line as heavily in the Mexican-American community because that payment is going to be met. Some relative, someone in the family, is going to help him because you don't lose the home; whereas, in the black community, the historical pattern of the last hundred years of the breaking up of the family structure, et cetera, they don't have the cohesiveness that has been maintained in the Mexican-American community.

An example of cohesiveness in the Peace Corps. We found that any Latin, whether it was Puerto Rican, Mexican-American, Cuban--even though the desire was there to join the Peace Corps--we had a very high drop out rate because they would get too homesick for the home. Therefore, the dropout was too high so you had to be very careful in selecting.

So you didn't have as many in the program as you would have liked to have had. It wasn't a question of not wanting them, but one of the utilization of what funds were available, to their maximum. There were times when you could have but you didn't dare, primarily because we predicted that the dropout was going to be there. This happened with my own brother. He's

Schechter: very good in electronics, and the company he works for, Hughes, was sending him to South America as a trouble shooter, and he developed ulcers because he couldn't stand being away from his family. The last time he came home they never sent him back because they knew they couldn't. He just got too homesick. This is what I mean about the close family ties. They just can't stand being away.

Chall: Regardless of the pain that comes from being with the family as it obviously, in many cases, does.

Schechter: Yes.

Life on Her Own: The Precautions of a Single Woman

Chall: Did you stay home until you were married?

Schechter: Yes. I stayed home until I got married because you couldn't leave the home. So I married someone I didn't want to marry. I did marry a Mexican-American the first time. The first opportunity I had, once I was financially able.

Chall: This got you away from home?

Schechter: Yes, it got me away from home. I got a divorce. It was the first divorce in the family.

Chall: Except for your mother's.

Schechter: Well, that she forgot about immediately. She refused to see me for a year. She would accept my former husband but she would not accept me. It took her a year to finally accept me. Then I married someone I really felt congenial with, and I'm now married to him and have been for twenty-one years.

Chall: Were you married very young the first time? Was your husband a Catholic, and about your age?

Schechter: I was nineteen. He was twenty-five. He was a Baptist.

Chall: So this was actually a way to leave home.

Schechter: Yes. You just didn't do it any other way.

Chall: That's what I had understood so I wanted to check with you and see if it worked out that way with you.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: How many years then were you unmarried?

Schechter: I was unmarried for five years.

Chall: Then you were able to live away from home in your own apartment?

Schechter: Yes, although I maintained my family's address. I'd go back for periods, but most of the time I had my own apartment. I primarily used that address because a woman faces many problems when she lives alone; at least, I did, and I imagine to some extent you still do. A man, whether he's married or single, will always try to come around. So I was very careful not to let most people, other than very close people, know that I lived alone, because the few times that I did let it out, I would find someone knocking at my door, who I knew was married, wanting to come and visit me.

So you always have that sense of not being respected; you seem to be the person they can make once they find out you have your own apartment and you live alone. I found it very difficult, no matter how avant-garde I thought I was; I found it much easier to avoid those kinds of situations by always using my home address. That was one of my reasons, because I quickly found that I was having too many problems.

I was then active in politics, working for the union, and I met men of every strata. I always made it a point to meet the wife, and become very friendly with the wife, so that at no point was she threatened. I didn't want her to be threatened, because I was interested in getting along on my job, and it was to my advantage not to have problems on that level, which were completely unnecessary. And the same way in politics. I'll give you a few examples.

Even in the sixties, when I was with the Peace Corps, I found out, to my horror, that I could not walk up to a hotel desk--and I'm now talking about the Madison Hotel in Washington, D.C., the Mayflower, all the top hotels--I would go to the desk and ask for my key, and you have to ask for the room number. I would no sooner get to my room than the phone would ring; some man listening would call me up and ask me to come and have a drink. I would go into the restaurant of the hotel and find that someone would walk over and try to join me, try to buy me a drink. "Can I have dinner with you?" And if I insisted on his leaving, I had to get nasty because they act convinced that if you're a woman alone, you're on the make.

Schechter: I remember one time arriving in Washington, D.C. after 11:00, and all the restaurants were closed; there was a hot dog place two blocks away that was open and I went over there because I was hungry. They served rare steak on the plane and I can't eat it, so I was hungry. So I went to this hot dog place, and I finally had to call the manager over, because a man quickly glommed onto me and wanted to talk, and wanted to know where I was staying, and what I was going to do in Washington. My greatest fear is of being murdered, and I find that a lot of times this may happen because you don't know who you're with. I never dated a man except that I knew what his background was, who he was; I checked him out thoroughly.

Being the oldest in my house, my mother not knowing the English language, this being an urban community, my sisters all met boys whom we didn't know. We didn't know their background; we didn't know their families. As soon as I found out their names, I checked them out through the DMV; then I would run a check through the police department. I had contacts with the police department, and the sheriff's office, and I would turn over the license number and all the information I had and run a make on them.

I did it primarily because they could be married. You always read in the paper about the gal who finds out he's a bigamist after they're married and have a child. I was trying to minimize whatever problems may arise later that could be avoided. It got to the point where the girls wouldn't bring their boyfriends in the house, so I'd send a younger one out and say, "Go write that license number down." They never knew what I did, that I was doing it anyway. But I did find one that had narcotics, rape, possession of a gun, and I even got the picture with the number. I didn't dare do it at home because my mother would climb all over. She'd never realize that I was trying to help. All she would know is, "Look who you've found. You're nothing but a tramp." This was her way, and this, to me, was the wrong approach.

I remember taking my sister out for a cup of coffee because I didn't want anyone else to hear; too many ears when there are that many kids around. I took her out for coffee and said, "Do you know so and so?" And I showed her the picture. And she dropped her jaw. I had the complete make on him. There wasn't a thing he hadn't done. Armed robbery.

I think it's very important to know who you're dating and who you're going with no matter what your background is, what your economic situation, because it happens to all women,

Schechter: regardless of economic background, regardless of educational background, because they don't take the trouble to know who they're dealing with, and who they're going with. I've always thought it was very important to know who your friends are. Check them out. I think it's very important. You just don't know. It's too big a community. The world has closed in on us, and you just don't know who you're dealing with.

Chall: So you were a very cautious young woman?

Schechter: Always. Always have been. As a consequence, I never had any unhappy experiences and I think it's because I've always been a very cautious person. All you have to do is read the paper and you always wonder, "How couldn't she have known?" Even just recently, wasn't it a congressman? How could she not have run a make on him and found out that he was married? I just think there should be a little list of what women should do.

Chall: You were pretty careful at a very young age, but I guess you had seen an awful lot while you were growing up.

When did you cut your hair?

Schechter: When I left home.

Chall: Was that a great relief to you?

Schechter: Yes. And being able to wear make-up.

Chall: So you really went out and did it.

Schechter: Yes. I saw a movie, as an adult, for the first time. So to this day I live the part because it's so real. I'm the kind that when the train starts coming towards you I start climbing the seat. When they scream, I scream. Because I'm living it. I'm a Cancer and I think we are a very emotional kind of people, on top of being a Latin.

I think most authors would love me as a reader because I cry with their books, I laugh with their books, I literally live a book. And I do the same thing with a movie, or with a play; I literally live it. A lot of it maybe has to do with the fact that I never had it as a child. We couldn't watch movies; we couldn't go to them. It was sinful to see pictures.

Chall: Did this strictness carry through all the children, or did your mother finally relax a bit?

Schechter: No. She let up with the others because I, little by little, was able to have some impact on how wrong she was in the manner in which she was raising them. They were able to wear bobby socks, they were able to cut their hair. There were many changes as the years went by. But I would say I bore the brunt of it, and to a large extent they had a happier time. I was the buffer.

Chall: You were the first, and everything had changed for your mother at that time.

Schechter: Yes. I'm the one that insisted, for example, that all of them graduate from high school. So they all did. Even though I had to be harsh in some instances. And it has been very important, because if you want to take a state test, any kind of exam, that's the minimum required. So they have never had a problem in terms of meeting the minimum requirements. Some of them have gone on to higher education.

Returning to School

Chall: Did you ever finish high school? You dropped out in the eleventh grade and went to work, but did you ever take the GED?

Schechter: No. I went back to night school and finally graduated from Hollywood High School. The chairman of the Assembly Educational Committee--he just died not too long ago--was Carley Porter, and I went to see him.

Working for a union, you were constantly crossing social levels. I was running in a very high level crowd--professors from universities, attorneys, professional people at all levels, business people--and going to dinner parties. One evening they were talking about sociology, and I had never even heard the word. I quickly enrolled in LACC [Los Angeles Community College]--this was without a high school diploma--and I took sociology. The next dinner party they were talking about psychology, so I quickly enrolled in a class in psychology. In the meantime, Sig Arywitz and Abe Levy had been working on me, so they talked me into taking a literature class at UCLA; I took a math class because I felt deficient in that.

Then I went to Harvard University [as a Littauer Scholar]. I'll never forget; I was making some kind of a presentation and the now-famous John Dunlop was one of our teachers. He interrupted me mid-sentence and said, "You just split an infinitive." I

Schechter: didn't even know what a split infinitive was, so I didn't even know that I was being insulted other than his tone implied he was insulting me. I asked someone what a split infinitive was. When I came back from Harvard I enrolled in a grammar class on the college level and quickly corrected that error.

When I got married, my husband insisted that, even though I had two years of college background by this time, that I should, at least, get my high school diploma. I found out that I could get my high school diploma if I used my college credits, which I didn't want to do. So I asked Carley Porter if I couldn't just pass an exam. Just that year before, they had passed a law that you had to go to night school for one year. I went five nights a week for one year. I took an elimination exam in foreign language, which was Spanish, and got an "A". Because of the literature background I had, I took an elimination exam in that. I took several. So I just took the bare minimum. Arithmetic has always escaped me. ##

II ORGANIZER AND BUSINESS AGENT: THE INTERNATIONAL LADIES'
GARMENT WORKERS UNION, 1945-1956

[Interview 2: March 20, 1978] ##

Chall: What I wanted to do tonight was to get into your union work, mainly, because that's a totally different aspect of a woman's history than I've had. I think that's an important part of your life. As important, maybe, as your experiences in the Democratic party.

The information that we got last time was that you left school about, I guess in the middle of your junior year.

Schechter: Eleventh grade.

Chall: Eleventh grade--that's junior year?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Did you start it at all?

Schechter: Oh, yes, I started it.

Chall: And then left in the middle of it and went to work?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Now, at that age, which is generally sixteen or so, you were not considered truant by leaving?

Schechter: No. You already could leave school at age sixteen.

Chall: So that's what you did.

Schechter: Yes, and you were eligible to apply for a Social Security card, et cetera, which I did.

Chall: What did your parents think of that?

Schechter: They were delighted that I went off to work. There was no strong emphasis on education because, at that point, discrimination really was quite rampant. Even if you had the proper background academically, you still had a difficult time making it.

My mother, of course, coming from a rural area in Mexico where the woman gets married and has children--the pregnant and barefoot kind of thing, and beholden to your husband, was really her philosophy. So she never, in any way or form encouraged--not that she didn't want to encourage; she had no understanding that this was available and that this is something that you could do. I think this is really the essence of my mother's philosophy. So my leaving school meant nothing, because I had already gone beyond what she had. She went through the sixth grade, which in Mexico--my understanding--is almost the equivalent of our high school in terms of Johnny can read and write, vocabulary.

My stepdad taught himself how to read and write, in English, without one day in school in the United States, because of the good grounding he had in Spanish, which most of our kids don't have here in this country.

First Job in the Garment Industry: The Sewing Machine

Chall: So that means you just went out to get work. Where did you find a job and what did you have in mind when you started out to look for a job? How did you start looking?

Schechter: I started out looking in areas where no academic background was required. So I went into the garment industry. I had had sewing in school. Because I was the oldest--Mother never could sew. So I, at the age of eleven, started making her clothes and my clothes. Then it evolved into my making--we were seven girls and two boys, so I made all the clothes for the girls. For a pittance, you could make an awful lot of clothes. They ended up being the best-dressed girls in school. I did too. Of course, we always borrowed from one another, too, so we all had a fantastic wardrobe.

Remember the skirts and blouses thing? Well, we never ran out of blouses.

So, I went to work in the garment industry.

Chall: In what company?

Schechter: The first was Royal Manufacturing. I don't believe they are in business anymore. They made primarily women's sportswear and uniforms. Many operations are fly-by-night, as you well know--and it's seasonal, so that one lets up and then you go to another factory. I think Royal is the one I may have worked for the longest. I must have worked with them at least two years. From then on, it was six months in this shop, three months in that one; some as short as a month. Because it's a really and truly seasonal kind of an industry.

Chall: The same now? As it was then?

Schechter: Oh yes, very much so. As a matter of fact, now they've gone into just cutting. There is some manufacture; I'm not going to say there isn't--there is some. But the bulk of it is being made in Taiwan, so they just cut the garments and then just ship them out. And they come back finished.

Chall: You were doing what? Working on the sewing machines?

Schechter: Yes, the single needle, which is making the garment, and then the special machines, which is overlock et cetera. I did that for, how many years--up until 1948, because that's when the union came around to our shop and interested us in joining the union. I got the girls interested in getting organized so that--we signed them up a hundred percent.

Chall: So you worked, what, four, five years before the union work started?

Lockheed: The Assembly Line

Schechter: I forgot one phase. I worked in the garment industry; then when the war came, I went to work for Lockheed.

Chall: Doing what?

Schechter: An assembler.

Chall: That was what--1942? Early '42?

Schechter: Probably. Until about '45.

Chall: Let's see, Pearl Harbor was December 7, 1941 and then the war industries ran full steam.

Schechter: That wasn't until about '42 or '43. I worked until about '45.

Chall: Till the war ended?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: In Lockheed.

Schechter: Yes. I forgot that phase.

Chall: That's an important phase.

Schechter: I remember, that's when I joined the machinists. That was my first exposure to a union.

Chall: You had to belong to a union, didn't you?

Schechter: Yes, you had to belong to Local #727 Machinists Union. That phased out with the ending of all the contracts after the war. They did offer me, which apparently wasn't applicable to everyone, a job at Burbank. Now, if you remember, I lived in East Los Angeles. Without a car, it was like saying the other end of the world. So I turned it down. Even though I needed the job, there was just no way I could commute that far. Public transportation was just out of the question.

Chall: Did you get married in there somewhere?

Schechter: Yes. I got married in '41.

Chall: That was for how long?

Schechter: Until my divorce in '50. So it was nine years.

Chall: I didn't realize that. So you continued living in East Los Angeles in your own apartment?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: And you worked.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Did your husband go into the service?

Schechter: He was in the service, out of the country.

Chall: Until about '45?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: I see. So you were one of the women who joined the Rosie the Riveter group?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: As a Mexican, there was no problem about your getting into a union, or anything of that kind, as there was with blacks?

Schechter: Not during war years. During the war years, all the barriers were down. They needed the bodies; they needed the workers.

I know that renting was a problem. I remember two apartments where I got turned down because I was Mexican-American--and this is in East L.A. I remember trying to purchase a home, because we've always been home-owners, my family has--not only do you own your own home; it's paid off. Every one of us lives in a house and it's paid off. There's no such thing as payments. Whatever we buy, we pay for immediately. I remember when I got one house paid off, I wanted to buy another in a nicer area. I lived in a nice area but I wanted to upgrade it. I found it very difficult--where they wouldn't even show it to you.

I don't see any signs now of overt discrimination.

Chall: Against the Mexican-Americans?

Schechter: No. Primarily of the laws. Everyone is so intimidated by penalties, et cetera--other than on an individual basis. But never reflecting the philosophy of a company, of something like this, no. No way.

Chall: So you worked during the war years at Lockheed and joined the union. And did you participate in the union activities?

Schechter: Up to that point, I had not [joined the ILGWU]. I had been always in non-union shops, not because I didn't want to join the union; they just weren't visible. I didn't know about them. It was word of mouth: go to this factory. Or you would look in the papers. This is how you would find your jobs. So I ended up working in non-union shops.

They came around with leaflets, et cetera, and since my stepdad had been a union member, and I had had experience in the machinists, I knew what could happen in terms of becoming

Schechter: organized. So I was very helpful. They always need a leader. It has to be done within the workers themselves. There's no way that you can, from the top, say, "Okay, now sign the card." It's like when you're trying to raise money. Someone who knows someone can raise it much easier than you as a stranger. Well, the same thing happens with organizing. I'd like to tell you about the organizational structure.

[Mr. Schechter enters room] You've met my husband before.

Chall: Yes, I have.

Union Leadership Training, ILGWU

Schechter: Then what they did, they invited me to attend their leadership training programs. So I started attending. Sometimes it would be in the evenings after work; sometimes it would be a weekend institute--Santa Barbara or Asilomar. Monte Vista--Upland area. And Lake Arrowhead, too. Also at Upland, there's a place that we used to go to.

Chall: Was this a sort of immediate thing?

Schechter: The minute I helped with that one shop, wherever that was. It was like they were really looking for someone who was bilingual.

Chall: How did they find you?

Schechter: They came around the shop with leaflets, that kind of thing. I filled one out, grabbed cards, and got the girls to sign.

Chall: It was that easy?

Schechter: I didn't find too much difficulty.

Chall: Who were the girls? What kind of mix were they?

Schechter: Primarily Mexican-Americans.

Chall: I see. And they were willing to--they weren't fearful at joining a union?

Schechter: Not really. It's always easier if you are inside the shop where they know you. The inside organizer. What the union did then was they used me as an inside organizer before they put me

Schechter: on staff, so that I would be like the plant in a shop. Go to work, and get to know girls, and then start to organize them. It would take a month before you really got to know everyone. Within the employees themselves, there are the sheep, you know, and the main thing is to hit the leader. If you find out who the leader is within a factory, whether it's an office, or factory, et cetera, they all fall into line.

I always found that was the key to organize them--to find out who the leaders were; then the others sort of fall into line. Not that you won't hit some hard-rock people, who just won't join. The one whose husband is fearful that his wife is going to lose her job, and therefore, she's not about to sign a card, because little old hubby is going to beat her up if she tries to join.

Then you'll find someone who's tremendously loyal to the boss, is not about to join any union. I'm not saying the whole thing is easy, but all you need is fifty-one percent; so I wasn't looking for a hundred percent.

Chall: I see. So you jsut needed to find the fifty-one.

Schechter: Yes. It's nice to have a hundred percent, but I didn't need the whole pie.

Chall: What does that bring about then, in terms of organization? Is there a state agency, like the Labor Relations Board?

Schechter: It's national.

Chall: It's the National Labor Relations Board.

Schechter: Yes, NLRB. You have to have one-third signed up in order to qualify for an election. And you have to win the election by fifty-one percent. Then you negotiate a contract. But even winning the election, of course, doesn't guarantee that you're going to get a signed contract, which is when you then have to declare a strike, whatever.

Anyway, for a while there, I was working as an in-shop organizer. The union was not paying me for it. I would get a lot of recognition, a lot of kudos, but no pay; primarily because they never were a wealthy kind of a union.

Chall: This is the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union?

Schechter: Yes. It's not that they weren't wealthy. They were frugal when it came to paying. Good old [David] Dubinsky believed in keeping everything he could, and since he started at the time in the

Schechter: Depression when no one ever got paid, they never could understand why, later on, they had to pay. You have to start from there.

Chall: Is that so? None of the union leaders were paid? They were all volunteers?

Joining the Staff of the ILGWU: Organizing Shop Workers

Schechter: They were all volunteers during the Depression. There was just no money. So that it was after my being successful as an in-shop organizer, and having attended their leadership training programs, that they asked me to come on staff.

Chall: Then you were paid.

Schechter: Yes. So that was '48.

Chall: In '48 you went on the staff.

Schechter: Of the ILGWU.

Chall: So it took you about three years then, from '45 and the end of the war, until 1948. What were the working conditions? What would make the women want to join the union?

Schechter: Low pay, no vacation.

Chall: No vacations?

Schechter: No holidays. None of the fringe benefits that we now understand as the norm existed.

Chall: Eight hour days were required by law?

Schechter: Required by law. But what you would do, too, is come in before eight and not punch in. That's still true today. You punch out at 4:30 and keep right on working because you need the money. So that was one of our focal points--that if you got paid enough, you wouldn't have to work these long hours to make that same amount of money.

Because you're being exploited. Because he's charging the store just as much for the garment as the guy who is the union employer. Even if he sells it at less, he's doing it at our expense, and that should not be the bargaining factor. He should not be in a position to use that as a leverage. It's one thing

Schechter: for him to say, "My garment is better. It's a better style; better quality," and not, "I pay my employees less; therefore I can undercut the next guy." This was not a difficult point to get across.

The more recent people, let's say from Mexico, were a little more difficult to organize because, immediate arrival in this country meant getting a job, whatever the money was. By our standards, it was low. By their standards it was adequate. I remember visiting a woman in Chavez Ravine before it was taken over by the O'Malleys [Los Angeles Dodgers].

She actually had holes in her walls, stuffed with paper, and she was very haughty in telling me that everything was fine for her; she had a house, she had three meals a day, she had all the food she wanted, adequate clothing. She could not appreciate the fact that I am looking at the door where she had cloth, instead of a door to separate the rooms. The holes in the wall stuffed with paper--and I never did get her to sign a card. She just was so happy that she had a job, and a roof over her head, and food. I'm just using her as an example of some of the women and the background.

Chall: That might be difficult.

Schechter: And they didn't want to jeopardize their jobs. No way.

Chall: Did you go out to their homes? I mean, when did you do your arguing? Was it during lunch hours, or at other times?

Schechter: In the morning, before work, during lunch hour, after work. The bulk of it was going to their homes at night. This is why you always needed a contact within the shop because they get to know one another--their telephone number or their address. We had access to the reverse telephone directory, so even if you got a telephone number, you could then find out where. If, fortunately, they were registered voters, let's say, you'd go down to the deputy registrar's office and check out the addresses that way.

Chall: My goodness, you did everything to get them, didn't you?

Schechter: Yes. I became a deputy registrar. Then I got other people to become deputy registrars, because after awhile, I began to become well known, especially with the employers. There are constant--

Chall: They have their own network.

Schechter: They don't change, by and large. The employees may, but not the employers. So, pretty soon, they begin to recognize you as the troublemaker and from the union--quote, unquote--and so, you didn't have access to their employees as easily as you did before. If they saw you talking to an employee, then you might jeopardize that employee's position. Or you might do it even with a stool pigeon, because everyone has them, every shop has them--you know, the pet, the favorite. So you had to, after a while, become a little careful that--the key person in the shop--that you didn't jeopardize their position.

So I would say that the bulk of it really was night time and weekends. While I did do the other--go to the places where they would go to lunch, or stand in front of the shop. You still do that anyway, especially with people you know are not the key people in the shop. So I did that.

The Littauer Fellowship at Harvard, 1948

Schechter: Then in either late '48 or '49, the union sent me to Harvard University for a three-month leadership training program.

Chall: What did that--?

Schechter: That was very intensive. They really compressed into three months--it was just about a nine to nine training session.

Chall: Training in what?

Schechter: The history of labor, collective bargaining, negotiations, economics--they tried to cram just a little polish plus a lot of emphasis on your own work, in terms of being able to do a more effective job and knowing how to do it.

Chall: This was only for people in labor unions?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Was it just labor or management?

Schechter: There was management, but we only attended one session with them. The rest of it was related just to our particular field.

Chall: And that was labor. Were there other women?

Schechter: One other woman.

Chall: One other. Out of how many?

Schechter: We were only six from labor. There were, I would say, ninety-six, from management. You're talking about Gulf Oil, Standard Oil-- you name the major companies--Dow Chemical. They came with their planes, their Cadillacs--I'm talking about management.

We came in, almost hat in hand kind of a thing. So there was a strong contrast in terms of background, educational background, et cetera.

Chall: You didn't all attend the same class.

Schechter: We only attended one session together. We did attend seminars together.

Chall: But there were only six of you from labor?

Schechter: From labor, yes.

Chall: Mighty small seminars.

Schechter: Yes, it was almost like a one to one. That's why I say it was really a tremendous experience because you really got.... Does the name Sumner Slichter mean anything to you? He's now dead. He was an outstanding economist.

Chall: Was he one of your teachers?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Sumner, wasn't it?

Schechter: Sumner, yes.

The economist who resigned under Ford, he was one of our teachers. John Dunlop.

Chall: Were they faculty members?

Schechter: Yes, at Harvard. Littauer Center where we--

Chall: That's a part of Harvard University?

Schechter: Yes. We two women had one session in statistics at Radcliffe under T. North Whitehead.

Chall: Oh, my.

Schechter: The names are mind boggling that we were exposed to. Once a week we would have a seminar with, let's say, the chairman of the National Association of Manufacturers, or the head of a labor union. You name it--Charles Wilson was one of our speakers from General Motors. So that we were really exposed to let's say, the national leadership. I think you could just about name --names prominent, and sometime during those three months, they were crammed in.

Chall: What were you required to do? Write papers?

Schechter: Yes, we had to do a thesis on our experiences. Once a week, we would meet with all the faculty at a cocktail party at the Faculty Club. You know, wine--manhattans, martinis--wine kind of a thing. No so-called hard--that, to me, is hard liquor--but it wasn't scotch or anything. We would be invited to the homes of the different professors. So it was a whole new world.

I remember my roommate was from Pennsylvania, Gertrude Van Nord. She was from a small town in Pennsylvania. The manager of the local--from Harrisburg--which was like the central part--that was the head of the union for the entire state. When she called up and said she was rooming with a Mexican-American, his first words were, "Does she speak English?"

Unbelievable how backward they are in terms of the fact that we're born and raised in this country; has nothing to do with do we speak English or don't we speak English. I found that I spoke better English than she did. I found that I'm the one who had to teach her about bathing every day because we shared a bedroom and I found it rather annoying. She couldn't believe it. I went home with her one weekend and she told her mother all about how now I had her taking a bath every day. She just couldn't understand it.

Chall: What kind of a background did she have and what kind of union was she in?

Schechter: Also the ILGWU.

Chall: Was this only for ILGWU--

Schechter: No, we had John Crotty, now president of one of the railroad unions, as one of the students. Three of us were from the ILG, one was from the railroad workers union, one was from, I think, retail clerks union; so it was a cross section. I think one was a steel worker.

Schechter: Most of them have stayed in. Gertrude Van Nord did not stay in, and I did not stay in, but that's a whole different story.

When I came back, I had added responsibilities. Now I was not only doing organizing but also doing the job of a business agent for International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, in the sportswear division. Up to that point, you had the dressmakers local, which was the more skilled type and it was still heavily non-minority. The cloaks was almost 100% non-minority. They were just about 100% organized.

Chall: These are separate unions, are they?

Business Agent in the Sportswear Division: Discrimination as a Woman

Schechter: The same union; different locals. So that the tremendous need for minorities was in the sportswear because that's primarily section work. You don't have to make the entire garment. You make all sleeves, you make all collars. It's not very difficult to do that.

That's, I imagine, primarily, why they even hired me, because the handwriting was on the wall that if you want to approach these people, you have to hire one that can talk to them.

It wasn't all roses because, number one, it wasn't long before I found out that they had a dual pay scale.

Chall: Yes, I wondered about that.

Schechter: So that I got--it was a pittance in terms of salary--and the men whom they considered--the janitor, who was a friend of the manager of the local, got more money than I did, because, after all, he's a man, and he was a friend from New York, and had hit hard times and, therefore, he got a nice job as janitor, which was nothing in terms of a title, but he got a good salary--more than I got, because he was a man.

Chall: So you, as a business agent, got less than the male business agent, is that it?

Schechter: Oh, yes. Or even organizers. Yes. The cutting edge was male/female. And the fact that men have to support a family. And the fact that you now are supporting yourself, because it was in 1950 that I was totally self-supporting.

Chall: This was around in 1950, thereabouts, that you had a dual job as an agent and an organizer?

Schechter: An organizer. And that carried on through '56 when I resigned.

Chall: Oh, so you worked on the staff of the union--

Schechter: --for about nine years.

Chall: When did you find out that you were being paid less than the men?

Schechter: I found out from one of the other female business agents. And then started inquiring. It never had occurred to me that this would happen. Found out that I worked harder because I not only was in communication with the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking, but-- ##

A woman has greater access into a home than a male organizer. I found that when I had my housecalls to do--you always had a list of people you had to call on. Very often, I would have to go with the men because there was no way they could get into that apartment, no way they could get into that house. You have to think in terms of Mexican-American women.

There's no way, if they're married or single, that a man can just knock on the door and expect to be invited in. They wouldn't even open the door for him, especially if he's Mr. Whitey kind of thing. So I not only had to make my calls, but then I had to act as a front for them, which is what it amounted to. So they would work half the time, is what I'm saying, getting their job done, and I had to double up because I had to help them, which after awhile, begins to wear on you a little. You start out thinking everything's equal and you find out it's not quite so equal kind of thing.

Chall: And then?

Schechter: Then I also found out that I would be out leafletting or working, and of course, we had a staff meeting either every day or every other day, like at ten o'clock, or nine-thirty. I would be at a shop, casing it, or talking to this one, talking to that one, somehow or other chasing down a lead here and there. I'd walk in a little late, and, of course, I would itemize--because I knew these staff meetings--what I had done, and I would sometimes find that one of the other business agents would literally steal my sheet and give my report.

Chall: As if it were his?

Schechter: As if it were his. We always imported managers, even to this day. The man who is now head of this union, which is now apparently in receivership here in Los Angeles--

Chall: The ILG?

Schechter: ILG. They've never been able to organize. They never did. I really, really and truly attribute it to the fact that they've never developed leadership. New York has always wanted control and will not let go. The fact that they have ended up with zero --they still won't let go. I always kept telling them, "You'll end up with zero unless you let go, but you don't want to let go. You'll end up with zero unless you let go, but you don't want to let go. You'll end up with more if you turn over a little meaningful leadership rather than have us as the drones."

I was always a troublemaker with the bosses; with the union because I was always talking up. So they never really liked me. I was never one of the favorites. Because I saw injustices and called the shots. Primarily because what have I got to lose? They paid me so little, what did I have to lose but that little?

Chall: Did you ever ask for equal pay?

Schechter: Oh yes, I did ask for equal pay.

Chall: Did you get it?

Schechter: No, I did not. I would get increases, but never commensurate, or on a par with what the men were getting. Even after 1950, after I got my divorce, and then it became very important that I certainly earn more money. I would have been in real financial difficulty had I not had savings, or had I not sold my home when I got my divorce. Of course, it was paid off, so I got half of that. I did have a little to fall back on. I found that every week, or every month, whenever I paid my bills, I was constantly having to match from the savings.

By good luck, I eventually got married....

Chall: That was another five years, wasn't it?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: So you had about five years when you were still on your own?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Mostly you were working with minorities, and mostly they were Mexican-American. Were there Japanese? Did you once tell me that there were Japanese?

Schechter: Yes, we had a number of them. We hired Mas Kojima, who is now one of [Mayor Tom] Bradley's aides.

Chall: That is a man?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: So there were two women organizers and business agents?

Schechter: Anita Castro is Yugoslav. She came over from Yugoslavia into South America, so she was fluent in Spanish, and married a Mexican-American, so she ended up with a Castro last name. She had been with the union since 1933 and just retired within the last two years.

Chall: I see. Organizing?

Schechter: Organizing and business agent.

Chall: Was that a common dual role?

Schechter: Yes. Because during the day, you could do that and keep busy.

Chall: Being a business agent?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: And at night you did your organizing?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: So there were two women on that staff?

Schechter: Yes, until about--I forget what year Eileen came on staff.

Chall: Eileen Hernandez?

Schechter: Eileen Hernandez came in. She was Eileen Clark. And then we had a little Italian girl who also came in at the same time she did. I forget what her name was. Marissa something. Italian. Also from New York. ILG eventually stopped sending students to Littauer and they developed their own school in New York. That's the one Eileen attended. The one that the ILG had.

Chall: Because more people were coming out like this within a few years, does that mean that you were organizing more people?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: So the union was moving ahead at that point.

Schechter: Oh yes.

Chall: Who were the leaders? You've mentioned Sigmund Arywitz--that he was a public relations man. [Director of Public Relations and Education, Pacific Coast, ILGWU]

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Did he have anything to do with organizing the organizers or getting a union started in a shop?

Schechter: You have to remember that Sig wasn't married until after the [Governor Edmund G., Sr.] Brown administration's appointment [Chief, Division of Labor Law Enforcement, Department of Industrial Relations]. So that he was always single, and as a consequence, had all kinds of time to do everything, and was very versatile. So while he was the PR man, and a very brilliant person, he had the time to help in organizing. He would do all our leaflets for us. You just gave him the idea and he would--he was the creative person.

Chall: Was he the main person at the headquarters?

Schechter: No. John Ulene was the manager. If you ever watch TV and you see Dr. Ulene, that's his son.

Chall: No, I haven't.

Schechter: He was imported from Canada and very, very anti-minority. If you brought in a complaint about a Mexican American, or rather from a union member who was Mexican-American, he would just wrinkle his nose and say, "Those damn Mexicans." They should be grateful they have a job was his attitude. It was very difficult. I found myself becoming more and more bitter as the years went on, because they were not practicing what they preached in any way, shape, or form, in terms of unequal pay, in terms of discrimination, in terms of--well, personal problems. For example, Sig and Abe Levy--Abe was the counsel for the union --took me in hand and literally transformed me.

Chall: That's what you said the last time.

Schechter: In terms of literature, exposure to literature, history--really brought me up into the twentieth century. And my diction--corrected me at every stage. Introduced me to poetry, good music, opera.

Chall: How did they do that? Did they take you out to concerts and things of this kind, in your free time? Whenever you had it?

Schechter: Yes. As to reading, opera--culturally, taught me--the two of them did. But I did not get the opportunities which could have been offered.

I never went to a national convention of the ILGWU--never went. What Siggie would do--by now, Siggie had worked himself into a position of power. Managers could come and go. Because he was single, he had the time to work at it twenty-four hours a day. The others were married, et cetera, so therefore worked the normal hours and forgot about it when they got home. He didn't.

So that we would plot who was going to go to conventions; who's going to be this; who's going to be that. He always prevailed, because he'd already thought it out in advance, and done a little politicking, et cetera. So they would say, "this year the organizers get to go." Well, that year, they would switch me to a business agent. But it was always Siggie [behind the decision].

The next year would be only business agents could go; so they switched me back to organizers. So I never qualified to go as an organizer or business agent. In the meantime, because of my political activity in the Los Angeles area, the ILG used me. ILG had one very good technique. They knew that you had to work in the community, so six weeks before a campaign, they would release me to work full time in a political campaign.

Getting a Start in Democratic Party Politics

Chall: Did they tell you which one?

Schechter: In your own district. Mine was in the nineteenth Congressional District, which was the base of Susie Clifton, Elizabeth Snyder, which had a lot of competition, when you think I could have been in another congressional district and been anything and gone from there. But with Liz and, especially Liz in that district,

Schechter: it was very difficult to achieve any prominence because she had a track record; she'd been active more years, and therefore took precedence.

Chall: You're thinking about national conventions, or what?

Schechter: National conventions, state office, and the whole thing. I recognized that it was more important to elect her--it was understood. It was that simple. You just don't usurp, especially when you consider yourself a newcomer and they already are established. You have her full history, so I don't have to go into that at all.

Anyway, they would release me in a campaign. Because of releasing me in the campaigns--my very first campaign, I was appointed to the state central committee.

Chall: Who appointed you?

Schechter: [William L.] Bill Munnell, who was majority leader of the state assembly and is now a superior court judge. When he ran, there were five candidates running for office. Just based on qualifications, we decided he would be the best. I was playing a dual role--as an activist in the Mexican-American community, and as part of the labor movement. As an activist, of course, I knew everyone else who was on staff with every union who was a Mexican-American. Therefore, we were able to swing both AFL-CIO endorsements for whatever candidate we decided we wanted to back.

Chall: This is when he first ran for the assembly, then?

Schechter: Yes, in 1950. So we won. Well, if you won the primary--it was almost one hundred percent Democratic district, so all you had to do was win the primary and then they were in. So I got my appointment. Even though I couldn't really afford the \$100 dinners, because I was active in politics, someone would always give me a \$100 ticket--Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner, et cetera.

Well, Siggie never got any of that. In other words, I was in competition kind of thing, and he didn't appreciate that very much.

Chall: Were you in more competition than other male or female organizers and business agents?

Schechter: None of them did what I was doing.

Chall: I see. None of them were as outspoken, or as active--

Schechter: Or as active--as active as I was. I loved it. Given my druthers, I would still just about, you know, always be involved. I like being involved. I like people. I like to talk to them. I find it very easy to get along with people and really enjoy it. But after awhile, you have other responsibilities. While I'm more active than the average person, I have had to curtail in order to--had to balance it a little. At that time, it was completely overboard. I never had a minute to myself.

Chall: It can be a whole life.

Let's see, I did want to ask you some other questions about the union.

Schechter: I was a delegate to the Central Labor Council, which is the governing body county-wise, and then, through that, was on their--I forget what they called it then, but now it's COPE [Committee on Political Education].

Chall: I see. Does each union have a representation to COPE? How do you get on?

Schechter: Depending on your membership, you were allowed so many delegates, and then, from those delegates, you were allowed so many on what is the equivalent of the executive board, which then becomes the governing body. From there they choose, because you always have had a separate arm which handled politics.

Chall: Once it was CIO-PAC. You weren't in CIO?

Schechter: No, we were AFL. At that time, we still had two, AFL and CIO. John Despol of the CIO was a good friend of mine and his wife, Gerry Despol, was a very good friend of mine. His office staff, I knew them all. Gerry Leshin--who was his girl Friday--is now at UCLA--and I've maintained contact. She lives not far from here.

In 1950, Pat Brown ran for attorney general and labor endorsed [Frederick N.] Howser. I, in my district,--

Chall: Oh, my--

Schechter: Yes, they did. And Siggie was one of those who pushed for Howser. In the nineteenth Congressional District, I maintained a totally Democratic headquarters. I was in charge of the whole nineteenth Congressional District. He was so Machiavellian. I remember going to a Central Labor Council meeting--I remember they used to meet on Mondays--and he hadn't told me in advance,

Schechter: and to my horror, found out that he'd bounced me off. But hadn't told me in advance. And you had to check through him that you were no longer a member. I got on back again.

Chall: No longer a member of the Central Labor Council?

Schechter: Yes, because I had worked for Pat Brown. The irony is that Pat Brown later appointed him Commissioner of Labor. To me, the crucial year was 1950, when Pat Brown ran for attorney general, because once he won the race, from then on he was home free. I'll never forget that.

The Goodie [Goodwin] Knight race was another example. He supported Goodie Knight.

Chall: Labor did. Some parts of labor did.

Schechter: Yes, I think that was the--was it, I think, Graves versus Knight. It was a real nothing--1954--it was a very nothing candidate, but it was still the principle, and labor endorsed Goodie Knight. I found a picture with William Rosenthal, who had been state treasurer [of the Democratic State Central Committee]. I don't remember that he was ever state chairman.* He was an assemblyman, a Democratic assemblyman, and I remember he also endorsed Goodie Knight. Bill wanted an appointment. I took a picture from Siggie, where he was in a picture with Goodie Knight and Bill Rosenthal and I gave it to Liz. So I can't show it to you because years ago, I gave it to her. I felt she might need it as ammunition when she was running for state chairman.

Chall: What was the reason? I know that even the Republicans were upset with Goodie Knight because he was, according to them, too pro-labor, but he apparently had done labor favors.

Schechter: They were being opportunistic. They knew he was going to win anyway, and so they might just as well--there was no sense in fighting it. He's going to win. I just took the position that they could have gone for no endorsement and that way, leave those of us who want to retain a few ideals, a little flexibility. This other way, you were--your hands were tied.

*He was vice-chairman, southern division, 1956-1958, and state chairman, 1958-1959. He resigned because he was appointed to the municipal court by Governor Brown on January 16, 1959. He was elevated by Governor Brown to the superior court February 11, 1961.

Chall: What was the reason for labor's going for Frederick Napoleon Howser? That was the Howser?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Why?

Schechter: At that time, Teamsters were still part of the AFL and they carried a lot of weight. They were, if you recall, years back, very conservative. I forget what other union has always been very, very conservative. But they were, and they carried a lot of influence. CIO--you could almost bank on Democratic endorsements--but not AFL. That was touch and go and a lot of politicking and a lot of work, in order to swing meaningful endorsements for Democrats. Or a hundred percent, is what I'm saying, because by and large, they did endorse Democrats, but would stray from the field every so often.

Chall: So you were occasionally punished, then for being a full-time Democratic.

Schechter: Oh yes.

Chall: But you stayed with the union. Did you like the union activities, or was it the only way you thought you could make a living?

Schechter: I really didn't know what else to do. I wasn't trained to do anything else. So at that stage of my life, I felt that the only way I could....Well, I really needed the job. It was either that or go back to the garment industry. I could have gone to work for another union. For example, during my activities, I would from time to time organize office personnel that would fall into my lap, where I would meet women, men, et cetera. Even though they weren't my field, would show an interest, and so I found myself carrying Teamster's cards. We carried Teamster's cards, anyway, because we used to sign up the shipping clerks. That was a happy marriage kind of a thing. So we signed up the shipping clerks for the Teamster's union. Then, when we called a strike, they would be with us and would stop all shipments, deliveries, et cetera. The other way they could kill you. They'd hire non-union people and get the deliveries, and who needs you? This way, it was a marvelous marriage.

I enjoyed the work, with all the drawbacks, and with all the stumbling blocks that are thrown your way. It was still a good job. After awhile, with minor increments, at least I could meet my expenses without constantly drawing on my savings. At least I wasn't slipping back as I had been before. Then I became

Schechter: very active....Well, all this time, I've been active in the Mexican-American community. You see, you could not make a call after nine o'clock.

Chall: In the Mexican community?

Schechter: Any place. Most working people are in bed early. Don't forget, too, TV wasn't....Now they may stay up late because they got involved in a movie. But at that time, it was not uncommon for people to go to bed at nine o'clock, ten o'clock.

I happen to be a stay-up late person, so I don't know about it, but I imagine if I moved back to the area where I used to live, I'd still find that people get up at five, six o'clock. And they work hard and therefore need their eight hours, and so they're pretty early going to bed.

Nine o'clock would even be a little late sometimes for me to call. So you make your calls, let's say, between five-eight-thirty. You can still make a meeting, because most meetings hardly get under way before eight. So I would still make all my meetings that I had to go to. I loved it. I'm really, really a political animal. I'm sure you've heard it a lot of times, but that's what my husband calls me, too. So I was able to attend.

Then, because of the free time you have during the day, you can do an awful lot--can get an awful lot done, whether it's community work, whether it's politics. I always found that the daytime hours, you can get a lot done, whether it's community or politics. Since I've always been a light eater, I didn't have to eat lunch, I'd be out giving leaflets, et cetera. I still don't eat lunch. It's probably why I stay thin.

So I just made every hour count. I was active in registration drives. I told you I not only helped elect Roybal--because it was a registration drive really that was the key to that campaign. He lost the first campaign.

Chall: Now when you say the first campaign--Roybal was on the city council [Los Angeles] and in 1958, he ran for the board of supervisors. That's the race he lost.

Schechter: That's the race he lost. But before that, he was a city councilman.

Chall: That's right. And he was on there from '49 to '62. Did you work on that '49 campaign?

Schechter: Yes. Helping to raise money and registering.

Chall: I see. But it was the loss of the 1958 campaign for the board of supervisors that really disturbed you all. Is that it? The next step up. And Sanchez, too, was running for lieutenant governor--no, secretary of state.

Schechter: That was Hank Lopez.

Chall: Excuse me, Henry Lopez, yes. That was 1958 they both lost. That seemed to have been very upsetting to the Mexican community.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: So your registration drive was to elect Roybal for '62.

Schechter: City council. In '48, '49.

Chall: I see. That was the original campaign you worked on?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: And you did that in your daytime hours?

Schechter: Yes. Or weekends, or in between. With a car, you can get an awful lot done.

Chall: By that time, you had one.

Schechter: Oh, I always had a car after 1950. You can't do anything in Los Angeles without a car.

The Union as a Total Life

Chall: Were you aware of the discrimination in the union? Did you consider it sex discrimination?

Schechter: No, I just--I recognized it as inequality, but I don't think that I ever really thought it through. It wasn't until later, I think you don't want to face up to certain things. I mean, to say, racist pigs--like terminology now used--no way would I, because, after all, this was the union that was the saviour. The whole labor movement--Clarence Darrow was my idol, you know. It was very, very difficult to articulate.

Schechter: You were unhappy; got increasingly unhappy, but it's just like, I guess, if you marry the man you love and then he turns out to be not the knight in shining armor. It's a hell of a long time before you'll admit that he's got clay feet. That's about the only analogy I can draw, because I really, really, really was in love with the labor movement.

It's hard. Even now, were I to do it again, I would still do it with all the problems that developed from it, because I really think that it is necessary. But there was no way you could communicate to them what was really necessary and what they had to do in order to succeed. They've ended up with nothing.

Chall: They were organizing people, though, they were very--

Schechter: Oh, they were at their peak all during that time. After that, it got to be downhill. I don't want to say it was just me. I think it was just because a lot of us left--Felix de la Torre left. A lot of the key people who helped. Tommy Talavera left; Eileen Clark's husband, Al Hernandez, left--but he left for another reason. He had been involved in a strike, and got shot. So, healthwise, had to leave. So for one reason or another, what I consider to be those who would have been the foundation, eventually left. The only one that I know that is left of the old crew is-- I won't give you the name because I want to give you some anecdotes.

When he started out, every time he saw a garment worker, he only saw a garment worker in terms of, is she an easy lay? After making a house call or trying to sign up a worker, the next day he would show up with a bottle. And I would get the complaints from the girls. What's going on? We're talking about union, et cetera, and here he is, and I know he's married. He came to my place last night.

He was just a man who had never been in the garment industry. He started out as an insurance agent. His mother was a member of the executive board of the sportswear union. He needed a job. It was around the fifties, when it was one of these slight depression periods, he couldn't get a job. And she brought him in, and they put him on staff.

They started him off first by being in charge of the employment office. Then, little by little, they somehow worked it out so that he now holds a card, because you can only be an officer if you hold a card. You're not supposed to hold a card unless you've been a worker. So, that's who they have. But where else could he go? If he couldn't make a success elsewhere? If he had anything on the ball, he would have left. The fact that he stayed--I don't know.

Chall: That is the kind of leadership you feel which ran it into the ground? Did the union affect your private life, or was the union your private life?

Schechter: I think it was primarily my private life. I was married then, and very unhappily married. I married a man who was very provincial, extremely so. His idea of a vacation was to go to Phoenix, Arizona where his sister lived. And I wanted to travel. He was working, could afford it, and he just wouldn't. I could never get him to go to a movie on the west side.

Once I went to work for the union, everything was the west side--beyond Broadway. He wouldn't even go to a movie. He wouldn't give me a divorce. So it took me a good two years before I could get a divorce. The way I finally did it was I'd stay out late; he never saw me. I just wore him down. Never, never saw me and I never got home before--at the earliest, ten o'clock. Sometimes two o'clock in the morning. I just wore him down until he got to the point where he just gave in. ##

Some Techniques on Organizing the Shop

Chall: I wanted to go back and discuss some of your union activities. One of them was the success you had in signing up a shop. You told me last night that in order to get started, that you had to sign up thirty percent of the workers.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Did you have generally success in doing that, at that first level?

Schechter: By and large, yes. There were some shops, where, before I had come on the scene, there had been prior attempts. There were maybe some bitter experiences, et cetera. The employer had had a chance to fire those who had been interested in the union, so they were very difficult to organize. But you never stopped because you never knew what the employer would do. What he would do was start giving them all the benefits that the union would, but at some point along the line, he was going to pull them back when he began to feel very secure. So we always made sure we had a few of our people in those shops, that he was aware that we had, so that we could have reports back. Any time there were any rumbles in the shop, we were johnny-on-the-spot.

Schechter: Some shops we would hit, completely, with no knowledge of some of the workers, brand new shops, shops where no organizing had ever been attempted. The previous shops, where organizing attempts had been carried on, we would always keep revisiting. So you had success and you had failures.

One of the interesting points was that, at no time, was there a problem with organizing let's say, a mixed group, other than the Japanese. The Japanese were very, very difficult to organize. There's a tremendous loyalty to the employer. The gift to the employer. The constant ingratiating with--ingratiating themselves with the employer. That's one reason why Mas Kojima was hired, because, although they weren't that big a number in the industry, they still posed a problem because they were so difficult to reach. So we worked through the Japanese Chamber of Commerce, the business groups; Judge Aiso, we met with him. People who could understand the need for organization, because this is one of those fields where exploitation has never stopped.

Chall: In the garment--

Schechter: In the garment industry, the exploitation of the worker has--you think you are in the twentieth century, and when you go into that area, it's just as backward as it was way back. The people tend to come in before punching-in time and will work until it's time to punch in, and then punch out and continue working; will work on holidays, at straight time, and not get paid time and a half, or double time, as the case may be; will work on weekends. And get away with it.

Outlying areas at that time, like Maywood, Southgate, Tujunga --there you would find all white--the Anglo-Saxon is what I'm talking about--I found no problems in terms of organizing them.

Chall: They're easier to organize?

Schechter: No, I'm saying that my being a Mexican-American was not a deterrent. They were as easy to communicate with as were the others, and as receptive. The one concern I always had was one of not getting them fired. You know, you want to bring them along so far and you want them to help you, but not the point where the employer becomes aware, because he'll find subtle ways of firing them and then you've lost a key person. So a balancing act is really what it amounted to, as to how far you wanted anyone to go, and how far you wanted to expose them, in terms of the employer finding out who they were, until you were at the point of filing with the NLRB, at which time the machine's in motion and it's more difficult, at that point, to fire.

Schechter: But the walking on eggs came a little earlier in the game, where, first of all, you don't want to cause them economic hardship in terms of losing their job because, as I said, it is seasonal and they don't want to lose a job. They don't know that they can walk out and get another one immediately, and they need the money immediately.

You always had to weigh everything, all the factors, in terms of even the people who were helping you.

Chall: After a while, does it become kind of automatic, how you look at this, or is each shop a new experience?

Schechter: There are certain common areas where you will find you can do X, Y, Z. But each shop would present new problems, new techniques. But in terms of getting names and addresses, that happened at every shop.

The Hazards on the Picket Line

Chall: Could you get a shop signed up, like the thirty percent, start the work through the NLRB, and get a contract without a strike? Or did you usually have to go to a strike?

Schechter: I would say it would run like 50/50, where you would win your election and it was to their advantage to drag it out, because at the end of the year they could petition for an election again. So it was to their advantage to try to delay the negotiations in order to go into the year. Since we anticipated this, we would just arbitrarily set a deadline beyond which we would decide we can't delay it any longer because we know what they're up to. So we would call a strike. There was one big strike that we had that--where we had 500 people on the picket line. We were just a mass.

We had been organizing, in this one building, many shops. We had 500 people on the picket line. That was the morning when there was an incident on the picket line and three of us got arrested. I was new in terms of picket line activity, in terms of the consequences, in terms of the price you had to pay, and no one forwarned me, and no one told me to clear out, or any of us to clear out. It was a good hour before the police arrived and arrested us.

Schechter: It was a very traumatic experience: number one, never having been arrested; number two, with my kind of a background, I'd never heard of anyone in my family ever having gotten arrested. It was a very humiliating experience, even though I knew enough about the labor movement to know this was part of the fabric, part of the history of organizing. It was an honor. It was really a badge of honor to get arrested, but you have to balance it with my kind of a background where it was also a humiliating experience, an embarrassing experience, one that I would not want my family to know about. Coupled with the fact that, I think, they behaved in a fashion that certainly made it very difficult for us. The union immediately tried to get us bailed out, but every time the bail bondsman would catch up with us in a jail, they would transfer us.

Chall: Isn't that illegal?

Schechter: At that time, I'm sure we didn't have the protective laws that we have now. We had no breakfast because we had been on the picket line early. We had no lunch. By the time they got us out was about seven o'clock; we hadn't had anything to eat.

Chall: Were you three women on that line?

Schechter: Yes, three women.

Chall: What had you done? Each one of you had done the same thing?

Schechter: They accused us of assault and battery. So when we came up for trial, we were convicted of assault and battery; then the sentence was reduced to a misdemeanor. In the meantime, you had been fingerprinted and, as you well know, the fingerprints go to the FBI, et cetera. It goes on your blotter permanently for the rest of your life.

Then I had another experience. I was relieving some pickets at two o'clock, which is now after lunch; you don't need your massive line. Also with injunctions, once they get an injunction, they limit you to, let's say, two people on a picket line, et cetera. We had already reached this stage and I walked by. It wasn't even my picket line. I really had nothing to do with it; it wasn't like the other one. I was relieving them because I felt they should go and get a cup of coffee. I was just standing there by myself with a picket sign, and this professional strike breaker came by. We had devised a little song for her.

I was softly humming it; no sense in raising my voice-- nobody was going to hear it except she. She walked over to the police and wanted to make a citizen's arrest. The police came to

Schechter: me and said, "I know you; I saw you; you didn't do anything." I said, "Well, call the office." I should have just not told them to call the office, because they did call the office, and our office said the West Coast director was out of town and Sig Arywitz was in charge of the office while he was out of town. He said, "We'll have a test case."

Needless to say, in an open city like Los Angeles, there's no such thing like a test case. You're going to go down to defeat if you're working for a labor union--especially if you're an officer, which I was, and, of course, I was once again convicted, this time of a misdemeanor.

Chall: The other time had been also a misdemeanor?

Schechter: Yes, with those two, except that on the record, it shows that it was assault and battery reduced to a misdemeanor. So that makes a very, very big difference.

Chall: And the conviction carried what? A fine?

Schechter: The conviction in the initial one carried, I think, a \$450 fine which the union paid, because it was, of course, in the scope of my employment. At no time did I ever have to pay any fine. I think the second was like a ten dollar fine. Once again, it was on my record, and I remember coming back and being very angry, and always being volatile and outspoken, made it very clear how I felt in terms of someone using me as a sacrificial lamb. I always take the position that if you want to be a big hero, be a hero on your own, and don't do it at someone else's expense. That was the one point I was trying to make, because I have always taken the position that, unless I'm willing to put my neck on the line, I will not at any point expose someone else to that kind of a situation.

Had I remained within the labor movement, I don't think it really would have made any difference, because, I mentioned to you last night, that when we came back from our initial arrest, there had been a big rally. There was a big hall full of union members. As we walked in the door, we got a standing ovation because we were heroes--or heroines. But once you remove yourself from that milieu and you go into the business world, it's a wholly different picture. Every form you fill out will always have the standard question, have you ever been arrested? You always have to go into full explanation. I had that happen to me a number of times.

Friends of mine always have taken the position--and I'm not talking about the average, I'm talking about judges, attorneys, et cetera--that having that kind of an arrest is no disgrace and

Schechter: nothing that I should be ashamed of. Finally, because it was bothering me, one judge suggested that I have my record expunged. I don't know if you know it, but there is really no such thing as having your record expunged. It's still maintained.

Chall: It's sealed somewhere?

Schechter: It's sealed somewhere, but someone who really wants, can find it. Not only that, you have no access to FBI files where obviously they are there. I'm sure that now I can at least have access to it, but I know it's there. Even though, locally, I can now say no--

Chall: That at least allows you to answer that question, no, regardless.

Schechter: Yes, because it has been expunged. We're now talking from '48?

Chall: Oh yes. What had you actually done? How did you get arrested for assaulting somebody?

Schechter: It was a scab, yes--going through the line. You're talking to them and someone shoves you and you shove back. Just touching someone is tantamount to assault and battery. So this is how they were able to convict us of it.

Chall: It was traumatic for you, the moment you got put into the wagon?

Schechter: Yes. The other women--most of them were--I know nothing about the men's section, but in the women's section, you find that the bulk of them were prostitutes.

At that time, I don't remember that drugs were a big thing, so it was primarily prostitutes. While they were beautiful, when they would talk, they were tough. I mean the minute they said one word, you know, "What are you in for, Babe?" When you walk in, they don't know whether you are in for the same thing they are in, and they want to know what you're in there for.

No mattresses on the beds, none whatsoever.

Chall: Is that so? And this is a woman's cell?

Schechter: I wasn't there overnight, so I don't know that at night they didn't bring them out. All I know is that during the day--maybe it was the harsh environment--just to discourage you. And I don't know why anyone would ever want to go back. I think this is one of the strongest deterrents with many of us. If I ever wanted to steal, I wouldn't steal because I would never expose myself to even the slightest threat of an arrest. I really think they make their point in having a harsh atmosphere.

Schechter: We did see them eating. It's like tin plates. The inmates themselves serve the food, the trusties. The bread is not on a platter. They just pull the bread out of the bag and hand it to you, kind of a thing. I think it's very degrading. The food is on these big tin things and they just like ladle it--just like you see it in the movies. There's really no difference between--

Chall: Except you were inside.

Schechter: Yes, you were inside, and there were bars, and you couldn't get out.

Chall: Were you arrested and put into jail the second time, too?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: On the citizen's arrest?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Both times.

Schechter: Yes, and the second time I was just put in a small cell with another woman, who was just absolutely filthy. She must have just been brought in and she was like half-drunk, and her nose was running. I cannot stand absolute filth, and she was absolutely filthy. I got the dry heaves. There was no way I could not look at her, at some point, because it was a small cell and I was in with her. So once again, I found it to be a very, very disagreeable situation; one that I didn't think I should have been exposed to.

Chall: What was he trying to test? What was the test on that one?

Schechter: The test was that he wanted to get a false arrest on her.

Chall: Oh, I see.

Schechter: However, they had an attorney at the time on a retainer, who subsequently turned out to be a not very good attorney. I knew he was an unstable person. He subsequently went insane.

Chall: Is that the attorney for the union?

Schechter: That was the attorney for the union, and he was the one who represented me then. I'll always know he was incompetent because the judge we went before was Judge Phaff, who had a long history of being very anti-union and had you come up....Well, this to me,

Schechter: was one of the most minor situations. They had no need to arrest me, because even the officer was testifying in my favor. Still I was found guilty of a misdemeanor.

You would think that he would ask for a continuance or a change of venue, which is what I would have done, and I'm not an attorney, and I know nothing about it, but I can't say, "Hey judge, he's incompetent," when he's in the first place, appearing before you. All in all, all I'm saying is that--if you know the word sechel--they had absolutely none. I don't know how you would translate and how would you spell it?

Chall: I have Rosten and I always look up those words in Rosten.*

Schechter: Yes, he's excellent. But anyway, all of these were some of the factors on why I eventually left the union. I just felt that in terms of support, I never got it. On many of the picket lines that I had later, none of my people ever got arrested. If they got into any kind of fracas, whether it was inadvertent, whether it was one that they had devised without my knowledge or consent, once they got involved, I thought I was responsible for them. They absolutely never got involved.

I would instruct my gals on the picket line to wear two blouses, so that if they got involved in anything, those watching would always remember the one in the red blouse, but as they were walking away, they were to walk into the doorway and slip into a different blouse. If you had long hair, wear it braided, and then unbraided it. They'll never recognize you. All kinds of little techniques that you can use to quickly camouflage who you are--just for their own protection.

I knew that while they believed in it, why should they be saddled with any kind of stigma for which they would have to respond the rest of their lives when, in a sense, they were doing it out of idealism. They weren't criminals, is all I'm saying. There has to be a clear distinction between the two. We're living in a society where the equal rights of workers is not one that's recognized. It's fair play as long as the balances aren't quite equal.

Chall: And particularly if they were Mexican-American women, it would be really very hard on them. You knew how they would feel.

*Leo Rosten, The Joys of Yiddish, translates sechel as native good sense, common sense, judgment.

Schechter: Oh, yes. The consequences--I'm sure they would have been ostracized et cetera, had it been widely known. So they would have not only the one of jeopardizing getting jobs, but one of social ostracism within their own community, with their relatives, with their friends. So you really had to be very, very careful.

You wanted to encourage them to participate, but at the same time, you didn't want to jeopardize them--their livelihood, their social lives, their family life, and you very easily could.

Chall: Did you have a better record, in that respect, do you think, than some of the other organizers?

Schechter: To my knowledge, none on my picket line ever got arrested. This happened to me early on, so that I took my bloodbath early, and learned my lesson early, and from then wouldn't allow....If at any point, even though I wasn't responsible for that picket line--we always helped one another--if I was there, I would quickly take over in terms of making sure that there were no arrests.

Chall: Were you familiar at all with the National Women's Trade Union League? I don't know anything really much about it except that it did exist from 1930 to 1950 and they were most concerned with the issues of women in the labor movement. I just wondered if you were aware of it, whether there was much movement there.

Schechter: That was still in my early years and there were so many things going on, and we were involved in so many things. And I know I attended everything. I may have. If they had anything going in Los Angeles, I know I was involved.

Chall: That I don't know.

Schechter: And I did some of it right off-hand. I couldn't possibly tell you. All I know is that any function that involved my union, I was involved with it. Or involved the labor movement.

Chall: Now what about--I came across the name of an ILGW organizer who had started out as an organizer and gone to the vice-presidency.

Schechter: Maybe it's Jenny Matyas?

Chall: Well, Jenny Matyas is one--

Schechter: --from San Francisco.

Chall: Angela Bombace, did you ever know her?

Schechter: She was from New York, I think.

Chall: Probably. That's just a name that I picked up and put into your file to ask you about. She was an organizer and later vice-president of the ILGWU, with a career spanning the years 1918-1972.
##

Liaison with Congressman Chet Holifield's Office on Immigration Problems

Schechter: One of my political mentors, and you might have heard the name from Liz, was Harold Lane. He's the one who was the key behind her election to the state central committee. Harold Lane was Chet Holifield's chief aide. I became their liaison on immigration matters.

Chall: How did you function that way?

Schechter: Through the community and through CSO--one of the committees was the Immigration Committee. So we would have many people who needed help. Very often, you find that you need expert help. Mexico really is the one that creates the problem. They will not give them a visa. Without that, you don't get a passport, et cetera. By now it may have changed. It's been a number of years since I did this.

However, if they lived in this country for five years, then the Mexican consulate would give them the necessary documentation. So, we had to document the fact that they had been here five years in terms of receipts, et cetera. Something as fundamental as this, they did not know about. I even had to help them fill out the papers. In some instances, you had to have special bills introduced where they were under pending deportation--in order to stay it. If a bill is introduced, it stays the deportation.

I'll give you one dramatic example because that's more memorable. There was one woman who was being deported and she had five children, and a husband who was going blind. She was a garment worker. Her remaining in this country with five children born in this country, was crucial, and she was being deported. We were working on the assumption that the husband had always told her he'd finished filling out his papers--this is to show you how naive they can be--he had never really completed them.

Schechter: She of course, with five children and a husband going blind, didn't have much money, so she was going to take the Greyhound across to Tijuana. One of the advantages was you always have to go back to your initial city or town that you came from in Mexico, which may mean miles--hundreds of miles.

Through Chet Holifield's office, we worked it out so we got all the paper work done here. All they had to do was cross the border and sign. They could always go just across to sign in Tijuana and then come back that same day, so there is no loss of job, et cetera which, as you well know, can happen. These were the kinds of things that we were doing.

So the day--her luggage was already at the bus station and she was going to leave. They had had someone else drive; they had no car. So someone else drove her luggage and they put it in a locker, because they were going to have to get to the Greyhound by streetcar. At that time, they had streetcars. That day she found out that her husband had not completed his papers. There was some quirk in the law where one of them had to be a citizen.

So now, within like three hours, through Chet's office, were able to contact the consulate in Tijuana, the consulate here, and work it out so that the stay would be extended with enough time for her husband to complete his papers, and then we could complete her papers, so that she could continue working. Oh, the hangup was that had she crossed that border, she couldn't come back. And these are the kinds of things that could happen and why it was so important to work with an office that cooperates. Chet's office was absolutely magnificent.

Under the McCarran-Walters Act, there was one phase of it. It was the only change ever made--McCarran, which one died first? McCarran or Walters?

Chall: I don't remember.

Schechter: I think it was Walters. Walters couldn't brook opposition. One of the reasons why that bill went through the way it was and no one could ever change it, was because to buck them in any way, shape, or form, you were threatening them. So, no one could change it.

Harold Lane did. And he did it very simply. He said it's important for Chet's election. You talk to them in terms of politics and they understand it.

Chall: You mean the McCarran-Walters people wanted Holifield reelected? Walters was a Republican.

Schechter: Republican, yes. But incumbency plays a lot. If you remember, [James] Corman got divorced from his wife two years ago because of Goldwater. [Barry Goldwater, Jr.] That was the underlying thread through that. Corman told her he didn't want her running against Goldwater because they were buddy-buddy. So political lines can fade; those who are elected to office become very good friends.

Chall: I see, it's part of the club.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: So you mean that there was revision made in the McCarran-Walters law--

Schechter: --that affected Mexican-Americans.

Chall: Were the bulk of the Mexican-Americans in Holifield's district, or just enough of them to make it important?

Schechter: The bulk, the bulk. The nineteenth congressional embraces, I would say, the heaviest concentration of Mexican-Americans.

Chall: So he really had a great deal to do then, at all times?

Schechter: Yes, and his office had the open door policy. No matter what the problem was, whether it was veterans' benefits--anything that had an impact on federal legislation--the door was always open; help was always available on every level. And it's amazing the number of doors that they can open for you. For example, because he would introduce bills, every immigration attorney who specializes in immigration, worked very closely with Chet's office; he would introduce the bills for them. So then, on a quid pro quo, when I would hit the situation where there was absolutely no money to be had, like this woman who had the five children, then we had to have an attorney. And we got him for free. These are the kinds of things that we were able to do.

In some instances, where they could afford a little, then they would have to pay the attorney, but where there was a special situation when absolutely not a dime could be had, we could get the free legal services.

Chall: When you say we, that was done through--

Schechter: Chet's office. In Chet's office, oh, yes. As an individual, no way could I have done it. But I had the aura of being a representative from his office.

Chall: You were, then, sort of unofficially, a representative from his office at the same time that you were working with the unions and CSO?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: You were working almost entirely with women in the union? Were there mostly women that you were concerned with?

Schechter: Yes. Because the cutters constitute, let's say, one cutter in a shop was male, so the bulk of the whole industry was women. Some pressers, male, but the bulk of the industry was women.

Chall: Was there a concern for women's issues, aside from wages and hours, in the union?

Schechter: Always. You have to remember, there was a dichotomy: do as I say; don't do as I do. They didn't practice it, but they espoused all the meaningful things that you and I would stand for, even women's lib. They were ahead of their times in many instances.

Chall: They didn't promote women, did they?

Schechter: No, they always had just one member of the National Executive Board of the ILGW--only one woman, a token woman, never a strong woman, only one who took orders.

Chall: Was there an attempt to get child care centers for women who were working in the garment industry?

Schechter: Not at that time. I don't think it was such a crucial issue then.

Chall: What did women do with their children who were working? Most of them were women with families, weren't they? Like the one with five children.

Schechter: The older child. The sister, the younger sister. They're all large families. The grandmother took care of the children. For example, my sister worked all her life and my mother raised her three boys. It's not unusual for the kids to live with grandma during the week and then on weekends with the mother.

Chall: So child care, as we look at it today, was taken care of in the family.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Was ther a camaraderie that developed among the union activists?

Schechter: Oh, yes.

Chall: Was it within your union or did it cross unions?

Schechter: Cross unions. This is one of the advantages of having the Central Labor Council. It brought you all together in terms of common issues. Not just politics--because that's a very important phase--but other areas, whether it was public housing, or--you name the issue--we were involved in all of them. I know that you mentioned in your little note something about the Chavez Ravine. That was Proposition 10. We worked very hard on that. We really concentrated with the people who lived there, primarily older people--a lot of old people--because the rents were low.

When the campaign heated up a little, the opposition's issue was, why pay somebody else's rent? They bought it. There's no way you could communicate to them--no way--because we went down to tremendous defeat on that issue.

The Unions and the Chavez Ravine Public Housing Issue

Chall: You'll have to set this into the records. Chavez--

Schechter: Chavez Ravine was a federal land grant.

Chall: A federal land grant?

Schechter: Yes, and it was set aside for public housing.

Chall: Yes.

Schechter: And there's no way--it's tremendously illegal what they ended up doing.

Chall: It was set aside for public housing. What was the Proposition 10 about?

Schechter: Proposition 10 was to provide public housing. They were going to urbanize, under Urban Redevelopment, the Bunker Hill area, which is where all the low-cost housing was. Shacks--I mean they were old apartment buildings coming apart. There are still a few standing, so you can see examples of how bad it was.

Schechter: I remember making a house call with one woman who worked during the week. She was a garment worker. Her husband abandoned her. She had three children and lived in this ramshackle apartment building, then on weekends, worked as a cocktail waitress to make ends meet. I went to visit her--I think she'd moved to another shop--and it's now non-union--so I went to visit her and get her involved in the union. She had bought a washing machine, because she was so busy, she didn't have time to do the laundry for the kids. Finally she was able to afford a washing machine, and couldn't install it because the wooden floors wouldn't hold this washing machine. That, to me, was one of the biggest tragedies. This poor woman works at two jobs, finally buys a washing machine, and can't have it installed because the floor wouldn't hold it. Anyway, that's the life of a woman when you have to work.

Chall: I see. Now Chavez Ravine was supposed to be used for that housing then?

Schechter: Yes. In other words, the people who are now going to be moved out of Bunker Hill--the understanding was that public housing was to be provided for them in Chavez Ravine. Then there was the referendum.

Chall: To see if the people wanted public housing put in there, is that it?

Schechter: Yes. And they voted it down. I really worked hard on that campaign. That's why when the O'Malley-Dodger thing came up, I worked with Roz [Wyman] to help put it through. By that time, I was so disillusioned, that I figured--my husband likes baseball--if they want to be that dumb, let my husband enjoy baseball.

Chall: I guess that was the only other use that it could be put to at that point.

Schechter: Yes, except that it was like giving it to him, really.

Chall: He's got to pay for it. I think Mrs. Wyman pointed that out in her interview.* She was apparently not popular on the Chavez Ravine-Dodger issue. Was she opposed to putting public housing in there herself?

Schechter: No, that issue was completely over and done--that had been done with.

*Rosalind Wyman, oral history interview, in process.

Chall: When was that? Do you recall that?

Schechter: It was the early fifties, early, early fifties.

Chall: She came on in early 1953, I think.

Schechter: Okay. So then this had to be, I would say '50 or '51, around there.

Chall: She did tell me that public housing was no longer an issue.

Schechter: No way. By the time she came on the scene, and the Dodgers Stadium came on the scene, the other had been thoroughly trounced and there was nothing you could do about it anymore.

Chall: Why was it placed on the ballot? Why was the public housing measure put on the ballot?

Schechter: I think it was put on by the opposition. You know, once and for all, let's get rid of it as an issue and have people vote on it. And they had the money, and we didn't. Therefore, they were able to sell and get their point across, and we never were able to get our message across.

Chall: Was there a reason why they didn't want public housing in Chavez Ravine, or did they not want public housing anywhere?

Schechter: I don't think they wanted public housing anywhere. I think the forces of reaction were much stronger then than they are now. Just looking in terms of the representatives we've elected in California, Orange County, I think it was much, much more conservative in those times.

Chall: Was it expected that the public--that the people who would live in public housing would be blacks and Mexican-Americans, and they weren't wanted in the neighborhood? Sometimes that's a problem.

Schechter: No, not really, because the majority of the people who lived in Bunker Hill at that time, while there were a number of Mexican-Americans--no blacks. It was primarily old Anglo-Saxon.

Chall: This was not a racial issue?

Schechter: No way.

Chall: It was a public housing issue?

Schechter: It was strictly economics.

Chall: And did you say that the unions worked together on that? That was one of those areas in which the labor groups worked together.

Schechter: Oh yes.

Women as Officials in Labor Unions

Chall: Now, were there many women in this group of labor people with whom you worked?

Schechter: No, not very many. In the entire Teamsters structure, there was one woman. There were two women, I believe, with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. I think we were the union with the greatest number of women.

Chall: And there weren't many of you then, either.

Schechter: No, no.

Chall: Two, three, or four.

Schechter: You did find that some of the office staff, who really were like glorified secretaries--I think of Thelma Thomas--with strong enough personalities to come forward, overcame the title and then became executives. Lois McKinstry from Local 727 Retail Clerks. She started out just as a secretary, Joe de Silva's secretary, and then developed on her own, and became a strong force. She even ran for manager, and lost--that position. But I think she even was manager for a while. So she started out way back of a line, which proves that many times, they're under-employed--is that the word I want?

Chall: Right. They are. They moved ahead then on their own?

Schechter: Yes. So that when you say "the officials" of the union--many times, you were working with like Gerry Leshin, who was John Despol's girl Friday--a tremendous person--college graduate, underemployed, once again. I'm sure John Despol didn't have the background she had. When you dealt with her, you were dealing with someone who knew the total picture, across the board, whatever the issue was; could articulate it, write about it--tremendous person.

Chall: So they may not have given her equal pay on a par with the men, but they might give them some kind of title?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Were you close to the women, or did you deal mostly with men?

Schechter: Because, by and large, it was a male world. Yes, I found that I worked with the Culinary Workers Union or the Steel Workers Union, or the Teamsters Union--always with men across the board.

Chall: Did you enjoy working with men? I mean did it make any difference to you whom you worked with, men or women?

Schechter: No. I found I got along with all of them. I think you have to draw a distinction between the professional woman and the "housewife" type. They're two different animals. One is one with whom you can communicate on the same level, and the other, you have to sort of shift gears. I'm not belittling the housewife. It's just that they were rather limited in those times. Now they've become more articulate, more outward going, more involved, more interested.

Another thing--in order to be able to work and be effective --I found that I had to become very, very well acquainted with the wives, so they wouldn't feel threatened. At no point. That's one of the reasons I think I was able to get so much done, was I went out of my way, and I've always done this: go out of my way to get to know the wife. Invite them to my home; go out with them, visit with them, call them up kind of a thing.

Chall: These are with the union people you worked with?

Schechter: You always, always, had to. I was constantly amazed at how even those....For example Tony Ruiz was the first president of Community Service Organization, and he is now staff man-- handles the co-op. They've now developed a co-op store. A number of different areas. And he is now a full time staff person.

I remember one time, being at a meeting--a weekend seminar at Asilomar, and Lucie, his wife, was with us. We were all ready to leave. And Tony got involved talking, as men will sometimes, and I said, "Lucie, we were supposed to leave--you know it's a nine-hour drive. Lucie, it's time to go. Go tell Tony we're all ready. Our luggage is already in the car." And she said, "I would never tell him." My jaw dropped. I said, "Lucie, you're not going to tell Tony that it's time to go?"

Schechter: And she's the gal who was in there on issues, as articulate as I could possibly be, doing all the work that the rest of us were doing, and she wouldn't tell her husband. So I went over and told him. "Tony, time to go. Come on." And I grabbed him by the hand, and off we went. No ifs, ands, "but I'm in the middle of a conversation" kind of a thing. It's time to go. I wanted to get back at a certain time, and this was a prior arrangement. It wasn't a question of interfering with whatever he was doing. He knew what time we were to leave, but she wouldn't interrupt him.

The Equal Rights Amendment

Chall: What about your response, after all the years of being in the union, with the ERA? Were you bothered by it because the union had worked so long for protective legislation?

Schechter: I think I was ahead of the ERA in terms we were always for women's equality, credit, right to vote, emancipation of woman.

Chall: The union fought it for a long time--many unions did.

Schechter: I think California, especially Southern California, in these times especially, the unions were always more conservative.

Chall: When the ERA first began to be talked about in this area, were the unions sympathetic to it? Were you, as a person?

Schechter: I don't know if we ever were in disagreement here, in terms of not being for. I don't remember there being opposition--

Chall: Really.

Schechter: --not in California. I'm not talking about nationally.

Chall: Yes, I see.

Schechter: I think we're ahead of the country on just about every issue, whether it's smog, or clean air, or whether you're talking about credit. Across the board, we've always been ahead.

Chall: So you didn't have any quarrel with the ERA?

Schechter: No, oh no. I inadvertently went to New Orleans this year, and after I got there, realized that they had not ratified or I would not have gone. And didn't Kentucky just rescind?

Chall: Yes.

Schechter: There's a question as to whether it can, whether it counts.

Chall: I just watched the news for about ten minutes tonight when I came back to the motel and there was a little vignette of the lieutenant governor of Kentucky, vetoing the rescision. The governor was away, and she [lieutenant governor] said that, as governor, she had every right to act, and she thought she was going to veto this rescision which she considered a very bad bill. She said it in glowing Southern tones.

The Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California
at Los Angeles

Chall: We haven't talked about [CSO] Community Service Organization at all, and I want to get into that, but first I wanted to know about your work with UCLA--the Institute of Industrial Relations with Arthur Carstens.

Schechter: They're the ones who sponsored most of our institutes.

Chall: Labor?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: What kind?

Schechter: It was always in conjunction with areas of common interest, organizational structures, underlying sociology. What they're really doing is studying you.

Chall: They're studying you?

Schechter: Yes. And problems of unions, whether it impacts on organizing, whether it's pending legislation--it always covered a broad spectrum.

Chall: This was for all unions?

Schechter: Oh, yes. Some of them were just for our union. Siggie was very good. So that in some instances, it would just be our union. But always, people from the university were in attendance, either helping set it up, or participating in it. We provided the membership for it, and it would be totally run by the university kind of a thing.

Chall: What would they be? A weekend?

Schechter: Weekend, primarily a weekend. Some sessions, a one-day, all-day, in-town kind of a thing. I think this is one of the ways of developing a membership. You're dealing with a membership that primarily didn't have even a high school education, so it was really educational, acquainting them with issues.

Chall: These were not union leaders, but union members, you mean.

Schechter: Union members.

Chall: Oh, I see. How did you pick them?

Schechter: Your executive boards, active people--you always let the total membership know about it, so that anyone who wanted to go, could go.

Chall: They had to be let off their jobs, or was it weekends?

Schechter: No, it was always weekends, or evenings. You never interfered with bread and butter.

Chall: And these were helpful? They were worthwhile?

Schechter: Oh, yes. ILG was always interested in the intellectual--in developing the members. Not just bread alone. So you were dealing with the union that was always interested in the members in that respect.

Chall: That's interesting, that it really went out of its way....

Schechter: I'm so insulated when we talk about ERA because we didn't even have to fight about it in that respect. I may have had personal problems as an individual, but never on the total issue. That was just like a family thing. This is the way they felt and this is how they carried it out. As I said earlier, don't do as I do.

Chall: In your union, then, it would be mostly women who would attend these institutes?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: It must have been very broadening. What was Arthur Carstens' role in these institutes?

Schechter: He helped plan and organize them.



1948/1949. ILGWU Executive Board and officers. First row, second from right, Hope Schechter; second row, center, light suit, horn-rimmed glasses, Sigmund Arywitz.

Hope Schechter on picket line. Late 1940s.



1951. CSO Halloween Fundraising Party. Third from left, wearing sombrero, Tony Rios; fifth from left, Edward Roybal; center, in white shirt and kerchief, Fred Ross; third from right, Eliseo Carrillo, now a member of Mayor Tom Bradley's staff; fourth from right, Hope Schechter.

III ACTIVIST IN THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, 1947-1978

The Community Service Organization

Chall: I'd like to know about the CSO and your involvement with it.

Schechter: The Community Service Organization was an ongoing interest in not just registration of voters, but areas of education. We need a street light, we need a boulevard stop--you got involved in everything. We need sidewalks--you name the area and you became an expert. You find out about the ebb and flow--that's how they determine whether you get the signals, or you don't get the signals, or you get the stop sign or you don't--it's a gradual process.

We were fighting to get sidewalks and that's when we found out about the tremendous number of absentee ownerships--the kind of situation that exists in these poor areas. Because we always owned our own home, I just assumed everyone owned their home. Also, I found out about the word absentee landlord, and I never had heard about it before. You can't be effective if you don't know about the community, where the pressure points are, et cetera.

Chall: You touched a lot of people.

Schechter: A lot of people, and depending on their area. If the father was a meat packer, then you would call Rod Rodriguez, who was head of the Butchers Union, or if they were a waiter, you would call the Culinary Workers Union. I knew all the business reps there, too. And I was chairman of the Labor Committee of CSO--so that I got to know every Mexican-American that worked for every union throughout the city, regardless of labor jurisdiction.

I got to know all the unions--the other unions, because I was on the Central Labor Council, and because I was on the interviewing committee, the equivalent of COPE--interviewing

Power to the Hispanics

Saul Alinsky's Tactics Build Strength in Barrios of East L.A. and San Antonio

BY NEAL R. PEIRCE

Forty years ago, "professional radical" Saul Alinsky used confrontation tactics and poor people's solidarity to overcome severe problems of poverty, health, housing and joblessness in the tough steeple-and-smokestack area of Irish and East European Catholic working families behind the Chicago stockyards.

Today the late Alinsky's legacy of neighborhood organization has resurfaced to galvanize the masses of Mexican-Americans, an often politically indifferent lot, in the barrios of San Antonio and East Los Angeles. Ironically, it is the active backing of the Roman Catholic Church that is making the strategy first invented by a Chicago Jew the potential key to awakening the sleeping giant of Hispanic political power in America.

With massive immigration and high birth rates expected to swell the numbers of Hispanics in U.S. cities through the rest of this century, the rise of Alinsky-style activism in the barrios may pose strong challenges to existing power structures.

Since 1974, San Antonio's Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) has registered 18,000 to 19,000 new voters, forced the city council to rechannel federal community block-grant money to neighborhoods where parks, drainage and housing have been neglected for generations, and challenged business leaders' promotion of the city as a center of cheap labor.

These accomplishments so impressed Los Angeles Bishop Juan Arzube that he brought the model to the sprawling East Los Angeles barrio, an unincorporated area where previous political organizing has proved ineffective. In its four years of operation, the United Neighborhoods Organization (UNO) has forced several major auto-insurance firms to reduce their rates, which were running as high as \$1,800 to \$2,100 a family, by an average 38%. Because of Los Angeles' poor mass transit, the East L.A. group's leaders said, auto insurance was "a survival budget issue." Now poor East Los Angelenos pay \$13 million less annually in auto insurance. The campaign triggered a nationwide Federal Trade Commission investigation of auto-insurance discrimination against minority communities.

Behind these and similar groups in some 20 cities across the country lies the explicit family- and church-oriented organization model taught by the Chicago-based Industrial Area Foundation that Alinsky founded. The foundation asserts that the welfare of families, churches and neighborhoods has been grievously undercut by "huge corporations, mass media and 'benevolent' government." The people running big corporations and governments aren't necessarily "bad men," it said, but, because the "profit line is the bottom line of their institutions," they're "blind to the destruction of churches and families." Redlining by banks or insurance companies, violence-ridden television programs, retailers abandoning established neighborhoods and heading for the suburbs, thus disrupting

family relationships and local churches—all are cited as examples of issues in a "war of values."

To fight back, Alinsky's followers now identify the family as "the spinal core of our society," and the church ("a network of families with an explicit set of values and ability to generate a substantial budget") as the backbone of organization. Seed money is

garnered from local churches and national denominations—the Catholic Church's Campaign for Human Development and similar funds of the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists and the United Church of Christ. Organizers are hired to find and develop "strong collective leadership" in individual parishes. The model employs careful issue research. It teaches members not to be intimidated by heavyweight government or business leaders, and has a multi-issue approach, so that the organization doesn't fall apart when one cause is finished.

"We do a power analysis of the community," says Beatrice Gallego, immediate past president of the San Antonio group. "The analysis shows who are the leaders and the corporate structure. Then, when our people go into the banks, they understand who's tied to what, all the connections."

Empowerment of people—so that they feel competent to take direct action on their own behalf—is central to the Alinsky approach.

Neal R. Peirce is a contributing editor of the National Journal.

Bishop Arzube recounts his initial exposure, in an organization meeting in San Antonio: "You could see that these people had gone through training; the ones who spoke at the microphone were not the typical rebel type, but rather people middle-aged or older. A woman of about 70 got up serenely and held her own ground when a politician tried to hem and haw. 'Excuse me, sir,' she said, 'I'm just asking you to answer yes or no. Will you support our petition?' And finally the man had to say yes."

When children see their parents acting with such self-confidence they view them as "heroes or heroines instead of passive victims, as stronger, more real than Kojak or Charlie's Angels," according to the Industrial Areas Foundation.

Confrontations—carefully staged and non-violent, sometimes colorful—are part and parcel of the technique. Alinsky himself used to recall with pleasure the tactics of the Woodlawn Organization in Chicago. Examples: threatening to tie up all the restrooms at O'Hare Airport—"one of Mayor Daley's sacred

cows"—or piling rats on the steps of City Hall. "Daley got that message, too," Alinsky noted. More recently, when the community group was trying to get the San Antonio business leadership, which it thought controlled the city council, to support the group's "counter-budget," members lined up 10-deep at teller

lines of the Frost Bank, asking to have hundreds of pennies exchanged for green currency, then lining up again to have them changed back. However, group leaders, such as Father Albert Benavides, also are known for acerbic, personal confrontations, which critics say have turned off potential supporters.

There's strict discipline in Alinsky-style organizations. "We depend on a leadership base of 150 people, each giving 10 to 20 hours a week," says Peter Martinez, the veteran Chicago-based organizer helping the East L.A. group. "We set quotas for everything we do. If you don't produce, you're invited off the leadership." The groups rely on dues and fund-raisers to keep themselves going. They stoutly resist government grants: "You do that and they're going to tell you what to do and who to vote for," says Gallego.

Both community groups still have a long way to go. And there have been reversals, too. The San Antonio group last year failed to pass a bond issue to finance drainage repairs that were desperately needed in the barrio. The East L.A. group is desperately concerned about slow progress in upgrading abysmally poor health-care facilities in its area.

Some conservative clergymen and church members have been skeptical about the community-group challenges to local power structures. But in East Los Angeles, says Arzube, the movement has produced "a tremendous unity of lay people, priests and sisters that we've never had before. This has brought many people back to active church participation, because they've felt that for the first time we were not telling them something they had to do, but were asking them, 'What are your concerns, what are your needs?'"

It's just possible that by tapping two of the strongest institutions in Hispanic communities—the church and the family—that the Alinsky techniques will spark the first significant political and social strength in the country's rapidly expanding Hispanic communities. □

Faced with a growing U.S.-Mexican rift, President Carter chose Julian Nova — a 52-year-old educator, who has taught in Spain and several Latin American countries and was the first Hispanic president of the Los Angeles School Board — to be the first Mexican-American to serve as ambassador to Mexico.

Los Angeles Times
May 17, 1979

Schechter: all the candidates for public office. So I got to know all the politicians. They wanted labor's endorsement. After awhile, other than let's say specialized areas like immigration, I could just about pick up the phone and do just about anything--get things done--do as much. Because you got to know them on a first name basis, all of them, and they got to know you.

Chall: Those were the movers. They could move....

Schechter: Mountains. CSO now has three credit unions, a death benefit society, and what has evolved into a Buyers Club. It started as a co-op, but the paper work involved was so tremendous that it was more feasible to go the Buyers Club route, reaping the same benefits for the members without the disadvantages of the co-op.

Chall: As I understand it, the CSO was organized in about 1950.

Schechter: It was earlier than that.

Chall: [reading] Chartered in 1947. When did you become aware of and a part of CSO?

Schechter: At about that time.

Chall: About 1947.

Schechter: I had been already active.

Chall: In what?

Schechter: Just as an activist in the area. Started out officially in the Ladies' Garment Workers union, and then just through community activities, politics. Because it was at or about that time that Monsignor John P. Languille who was at that time a priest and the director of CYO, had the gall to call me in. A friend of mine was with the CYO. See, I worked with all the organizations --that's the Catholic Youth Organization. I was active with the Council of Churches--

Chall: You were a very busy young woman.

Schechter: Yes. The Community Relations organization [County Conference] on Community Relations, now called the Community Relations Conference of Southern California was the umbrella for all the community organizations you worked with, all the church groups, ethnic groups--Japanese-American, Jewish, you know--it was an umbrella....

Chall: Right after the war, when all of these groups set up?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Was that because there was a lot of unrest among the ethnic communities in Los Angeles, and new immigrants needing--I don't mean immigrants from abroad, but I mean a whole new mix in the city?

Schechter: I think there was always a need--I think that they finally got to a position where they finally got around to doing it. Or maybe there were a few extra dollars. Let's face it, you still need a staff man, et cetera. Many times, if you don't create an organization, it's because you don't have the money to fund it. I think maybe we became just a little more affluent in terms of being able to afford the luxury of having these kinds of organizations.

George Thomas was the executive director of the County Conference.

Chall: This was a city....

Schechter: Sort of county-wide, and it was the umbrella for all of the community organizations, be they educational, religious--it just brought in everyone--labor. For example, I would come in wearing two hats: Mexican-American community and labor movement.

Chall: You were closely aligned, then, with the Mexican-Americans?

Schechter: Oh, yes, always.

Chall: You felt that this was your base?

Schechter: Yes. Anyway, this man who was then head of the Catholic Church out in the East L.A. area, called me in and wanted me to become a Catholic. He said that someone as active as I should be a Catholic. He was willing to spend a month with me, spend a day, or week with me, an hour a day with me--whatever time I had available, to help indoctrinate me. And the friend who brought me did not know--he was totally innocent--did not know this was going to be done. He apologized profusely, because I was just furious. I never knew that this kind of proselytizing went on. I thought it should have been more subtle--at least the initial step--not like the cold water in the face approach, which is the way I reacted to it. I was very gentle with him, in essence saying no.

Schechter: But I think they were a little nervous that I touched every base and couldn't help but have many Catholic friends. I don't remember if I told you the story about Ed Roybal. Roybal's wife was my matron of honor, and he was called on the carpet by the Knights of Columbus because I was marrying a Jew. As far as they were concerned, the fact that I was not a practicing Catholic, meant nothing. I was a Mexican-American, ipso facto, Catholic. Everyone who is Mexican-American is born a Catholic, and I am born a Catholic. I was baptized, and so they just see me as one of theirs. No matter that, eventually, your paths may not cross anymore. So they've always considered me one of theirs. He really was put on the carpet because his wife was my matron of honor--had participated in the marriage of a "Catholic" to a Jew. Even though she may not have aided and abetted the marriage, the fact that she was participating, gave it the aura of a blessing.

Had I known in advance that I was going to put him to this kind of, let's say, censure, I would not have asked her. Because I would never have done anything to hurt anyone knowingly.

Chall: Was he upset about this? What's his attitude toward these kinds of things--Roybal's?

Schechter: He was magnificent. I later learned he had gotten permission from the archdiocese before the wedding. He didn't let me know until the whole thing was over. At no point did I know about this. I would not have gone through with it, had I known that I was creating problems for him, which apparently I did.

Chall: Is he a strong practicing Catholic?

Schechter: Oh, yes. His children went to Catholic school. They're very strong Catholics.

Chall: Then he really did step out front.

Schechter: Yes, he did. And it shows that he's a gutsy man.

Chall: This was before Pope John?

Schechter: I got married in '55.

Chall: Yes, so the ecumenical movement hadn't begun yet. Had it, I don't know that they would have censured him the same way.

Schechter: No, I don't think so, either.

Then from this, evolved--I'll keep coming back to the education thing.

Chall: Right.

Schechter: Then I became active in the Council of Mexican-American Affairs.

Oh, in the meantime, with the CSO, we were attending national meetings. We'd call it national, but we're really talking about the southwestern states: Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, California.

Chall: Who was at these meetings?

Schechter: Different representatives. All the organizations, Mexican-American organizations: LULAC [League of United Latin American Citizens], GI Forum, New Mexico--I forget their names, because none of them use the word Mexican.

Chall: I have a very early one listed, Mexican Liberal Party, and then LULAC.

Schechter: LULAC is the more conservative. It's primarily the businessmen.

Chall: I read somewhere recently that that's the organization that now deals with the drug problems with the Mexicans. Is that so?

Schechter: A lot of them have branched out into other areas that are meaningful instead of just the immediate interest. Well, they branched out.

Chall: There were some--I've seen it referred to once as the Unity League. Do you have any recollection of that? It's as if it just came and went.

Schechter: This happened all the time, because we've never never had enough money to set up any kind of ongoing structure, like the NAACP or the Urban League. We've never had paid staff. Nationally, et cetera. For example, we had one meeting in El Paso, Texas, where we had representatives from all the different states--the five southwestern states. Our biggest battle was, what are we going to call it--because Southern California is the only one that would use the name Mexican. I think we finally ended up calling it Council of Spanish Speaking People.

Chall: That was the Political Association of Spanish Speaking Organizations --PASSO? This was founded in 1960.

Schechter: No, this was earlier.

Chall: I don't have them all on my list. I'll have to tell you where I'm getting a lot of my material here: "The Politics of the Mexican-American Community" by Ralph Guzmán.

Schechter: He was in with CSO from the very beginning, too. I know Ralph Guzmán very well.

Chall: He wrote a chapter in a book that has to do with California politics.*

So you recall, then, a lot of movement in the late forties and fifties toward organizing the Mexican-American community, for self-help.

Schechter: Yes.

Origins of the Community Service Organization

Chall: And how did the CSO get started?

Schechter: That was the Back of the Yard Movement from Chicago. He passed away recently.

Chall: Let's see, I think you gave me his name once--Ross, was it?

Schechter: Yes, he came out from Chicago--Fred Ross. He was the one who spearheaded it.

Chall: The Back of the Yard Movement. Saul Alinsky?

Schechter: Saul Alinsky, yes. In fact, they funded it initially. Yes, Fred Ross was on their payroll until we were able to raise some money to pay him a salary. Fred was later with [Cesar] Chavez, training "missionaries" that help the farm workers.

Chall: And this was the Back of the Yard Movement of Chicago?

Schechter: Yes.

*Ralph Guzmán, "The Politics of the Mexican-American Community," in Eugene P. Dvorin and Arthur J. Misner, ed, California Politics and Policies (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1966)

Chall: Was that funded, or helped at all, by Quakers?

Schechter: No, it was Saul Alinsky.

Chall: I see.

Schechter: Then we got some money--when I became involved and I started raising money from the labor movement. Over and above putting on functions--just fund-raising functions--you'd have crash fund raisers.

I remember one time we needed the money fast, so I quickly, in one week, raised five hundred. How did I do it? I got fifty people to donate ten dollars, each. Which wasn't a lot of money to ask him or her for, but it was enough to tide us over. Over and above having the usual dance or potluck dinner, to raise immediate funds or ongoing funds, you still had to raise money from a steady source. So what I would do is I would approach unions. They had a set amount of dollars that they set aside for community action.

I would get them to, let's say on an ongoing basis, give fifty dollars a month, a hundred dollars a month--you seldom got more than a hundred--it's a lot of money, on an annual, ongoing basis. But they were the ones that I could hit for immediate funds, and so we did do that.

Chall: The unions are supposed to have given the CSO a considerable amount of help. And churches.

Schechter: The Catholic Church was very strong and very helpful. Father Berry was assigned to CSO; he always worked with us.

Chall: The Fund for the Republic and the Marshall Trust Fund, are you aware of those? Urban League, ADL [Anti-Defamation League], and Japanese Citizens League--all of these gave you some help.

Schechter: Yes. The Jewish community helped initially fund CSO with thousands of dollars. And still does. The Mexican-American community now is setting up a sort of parallel organization, like ADL, based on the same principles, and I've just joined them. Coalition of Mejicanos and Latinos Against Defamation. Then came the Council of Mexican American Affairs.

Chall: Tell me more about what the Community Service Organization did. And what did you do?

Schechter: It was a really grass roots organization.

Chall: Yes, and what was your general responsibility? It was so big and so broad that it required, what, an executive committee that ran it?

Schechter: We had an executive board.

Chall: And you were on it.

Schechter: Yes. Fred Ross was the staff man.

Chall: Fred Ross? That doesn't sound like a Mexican man.

Schechter: No, he wasn't, but he spoke Spanish.

Chall: What was his background?

Schechter: He came from Chicago with Saul Alinsky. A real dedicated man, really, because he lived in a very modest little house, obviously wasn't earning much money, and devoted all of his time to CSO. His wife was a paraplegic, and so he'd have to take care of her. With no help. They had two children. Still, you could call on him at any hour, day and night, and he was always available. If you think I had energy, he had just as much energy and was out there working, every minute of the day and night.

Chall: Did you have a headquarters?

Schechter: Yes, on First Street, right near Soto, half a block west of Soto. You had to help in every area. As I said before--whether they needed a stop light, because too many kids were getting hurt.

Chall: Who decided? How did you decide how and where you were going to take action?

Schechter: Someone would come in with a complaint. Then, if you got, let's say, a rash of complaints and it starts to develop into a pattern of accidents as to this particular intersection, and the kids have to cross the street to go to school--even one accident is one too many--then we would, at the executive board, assign someone to handle the situation.

We soon had to break up into areas of interest, because there were too many diverse problems cropping up.

I helped out with the labor group, which involved fund raising, developing leadership. For example, Rod Rodriguez who has gained tremendous stature, was one of those that I brought in. He had never been active in the Mexican-American community, and I brought him in.

Schechter: All the Mexican-Americans throughout all the unions, I brought in through the labor committee. Their unions were delighted because it gave them exposure. They were interested in meeting the workers, and this was one way of meeting them on another level other than knocking on the door and saying, how about signing a card and joining the union. It was an added dimension.

Chall: To help find jobs for people, too?

Schechter: Help find jobs for them, help set up tutoring groups in terms of education. Voter registration was the key, though. That was because we recognized that this was the one area where we were very, very weak. Participation in politics. With a background in Mexico, which has a one-party system, who cares about politics? It doesn't matter whether you vote or you don't vote, the same person gets elected. So it was a total education, not just the right to vote, but do it. It doesn't do you any good to cry about it, or complain, if you're not going to participate. PTA. Across the board.... Someone needed a house painted. The benches the people sat on were snagging the hose, and we would go down to the supervisor--the one before Ernie Debs--Ford was the supervisor before he--

Chall: John Anson Ford?

Schechter: Yes. And we would get the paint, and either they would paint it, or we would paint it, but it would get done.

Chall: Those benches where they sat and waited for the streetcars or buses?

Schechter: Streetcars then.

Chall: This was charged, then, with an awful lot of energy, this organization.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Was the Mexican-American community caught up in it? Did they know it existed and did they hope that it would benefit them?

Schechter: Yes. It was very difficult initially to get them interested. I think the first lesson was when Roybal lost and, then, the next time around, he won because we just went out, door to door, literally door to door.

Chall: He lost the first try to city council, is that it?

Schechter: Yes, and then won the second one. Oh, you had a lot of problems with jails. You had the police, both the L.A.P.D. and the sheriff's office, beating up Mexican-Americans. I don't know if you remember the Bloody Christmas. Tony Rios, now state president of CSO, was one of those that was beaten up one time. They never knew whether you were a participant or an onlooker, or a civil rights activist, and if you were there, they beat you up.

But it was not uncommon, and I would say it was more uncommon for someone to be arrested and not be beaten up. It was just, as a matter of course, they would beat you up. So there were many meetings with the sheriff's office and the L.A.P.D., one of education et cetera. I'm not saying it still doesn't exist, but in no way does it exist as it did then when we were laying the groundwork. That was all pioneer work, where no one had ever done anything about it, on an organized basis. Because the lone voice is never going to be heard. I think this is when we finally--when I say we, everyone who participated--knew that the only way we were going to have a voice was a joint voice, because it wasn't going to do you any good, otherwise. That's another reason why we became part of the total structure, too, in terms of the County Conference.

Chall: Having Roybal on the city council, was that a help too?

Schechter: That was the first time that we'd had representation, so it was a tremendous shot in the arm to get him elected to office. It set the pattern for [Arthur] Alatorre and all the others who have gone on to the legislature, who followed.

Chall: I don't know if any have gone to the city council after Roybal.

Schechter: No one has. Yes, because we haven't had the pattern of strong segregation. The discrimination against Mexican-Americans has been a little more subtle, so that they have been able to disperse. We're suffering the pains of dispersal. So that they're more widely spread out--not heavy concentrations as the black, and therefore it is not as easy to elect a Mexican-American to the L.A. city council.

If you've noticed the black movement, it's like a spreading ink blot, where it's heavy, heavy, heavy concentration; then they tend to stay because it's hard for them to break out. Instead of having more and more salt and pepper effect, you have more the ink blot pattern. With the Mexican-American, you have more and more of the salt and pepper. You're able to branch out a little bit more, as long as you can afford it.

Chall: And where they're concentrated, they're unlikely to vote, because many may be aliens?

Schechter: Once you're a citizen, you can be active in politics. There's no problem there. Under McCarran-Walter Act, there was one saving grace--those who came to the United States, say, and were here for twenty consecutive years, could become citizens in their own language. Then you had a tremendous number of people who became citizens without knowing a word of English. So my own mother, who became a citizen under that kind of arrangement, was one of those who benefited from it. I never let her vote, because I was always nervous. I mean, why ask for trouble. I had enough problems without having to claim if she is a citizen. So she never did vote.

Chall: I was thinking of the housing in Los Angeles. There must be large concentrations of Mexicans in some neighborhoods, but they may not be citizens--

Schechter: Oh, of course.

Chall: --so that doesn't help with political action on a neighborhood basis.

Getting Ahead in the Mexican-American Community

Schechter: No. I think this is another problem. For example, the blacks at some point, can and they have, outstripped, the Mexican-Americans for years of education, because you have this constant flow back and forth across the border. Other ethnic groups, literally, cut the umbilical cord when they leave their own country, and they're going to stay here, and that's it. So they assimilate. There's a greater rapid assimilation from one generation to the next. You don't find that with the Mexican-American. This is why, while we may make great strides, we take two steps back, too, because of the constant influx--

Chall: I see. Of the new Spanish speaking--

Schechter: --of the new Spanish speaking. Then the maintaining of the culture, et cetera, while it has its benefits, also has its drawbacks in that they don't really become assimilated, don't really learn the language, so that we have fewer, proportionately, professionals, than do the black. They have something like eleven

Schechter: point something professionals; we have this two point. So, proportionately, we outnumber them and yet they outstrip us educationally. With all our work, we are still behind the starting line. You no sooner get to this point, and here's this new flood; so you just barely hold your own with all the work that you're doing.

Chall: And the generation that you discussed before, let's say, in the fifties, with CSO--that particular generation is not, has not become as professional as you might have expected?

Schechter: They have, but you have to also remember the families. I think the census shows that the average size family is two point something. Mexican-Americans are seven point. So you not only have influx, but you also have the large family.

Chall: That holds back some?

Schechter: Of course. Because educationally, you need money to do it. This is why the grants have now become so crucial. I'm on the Youth Opportunities Foundation and we raise money for Mexican-Americans to go on to college. Our symbol is a key. Prior to that, I was on the Council of Mexican-American Affairs, and we're the ones that set up the Project Head Start. We were in charge of Project Head Start for the Mexican-American community.

Being in charge of it, we had to find the sites, the teachers, et cetera. We were very fortunate. We had, on our board of directors, a realtor. He was able to find the best sites for the least amount of money. Also Superior Court Judge Carlos Teran.##

Chall: Do you think that the early period of the CSO was the most productive?

Schechter: Yes. Not only that, I think that from it evolved many other organizations, a lot of leadership. We still haven't really reached the level of organization, let's say, of the NAACP, the steady influence that that kind of an organization would have. CSO has continued. They still maintain a full-time staff. They have--I mentioned before--they now have this food cooperative which is now a buyer's club, three credit unions and a death benefit society.

Chall: That's very good.

Schechter: Yes. They have their own credit union now. Tony Rios--that's part of his responsibility--and they really have maintained the organization. But you're almost drowning. I happen to have

Schechter: been out in East L.A. today. I'm constantly amazed to see all these beautiful young ladies with four and five children. I have to keep repeating--not only do we have the influx, but the tremendous number of children. They really love children. But over and above that, they just have a lot of kids, and it's very difficult, under our economy--at any time--whether it's during Depression or now in a period of inflation. You're almost back to Depression days, just about, in terms of a large family. How do you feed them?

So, it's still a struggle for them just to raise the kids, because they have so many. There's really no room or time to think about college or finishing school because the minute they become of age to go out and work, they literally have to go out and work. Because father, by this time, is worn down and is struggling just to pay the rent and feed the kids, basically. And this is the kind of problem that you're dealing with constantly, on an on-going basis.

Chall: The NAACP, in the black community, faced with the tremendous poverty of the blacks all their years, still seems to have had enough men and women, who got good educations, who were then able to develop these leadership roles and organizations. This is something the Mexican-Americans haven't yet been able to do.

Schechter: And the bulk of the money for NAACP and Urban League came from the--not from the black community--but from whites. Somehow we've never been able--because we're not a national group--have never been able to draw on those kinds of funds to the extent that they have been able to. I'm glad that they did. Theirs is a much more dramatic kind of a history--the slavery and the whole thing, affecting people's consciences, et cetera. But the NAACP has been in existence since, what, 1905. And I think the Urban League since 1910, something like that. And have been on a rather solid basis. They've had their lean years.

Chall: But there's always been leadership there.

Schechter: Yes. And the mother, being the maid, has had its influence. You don't find that so much in the Mexican-American community. They haven't had that long experience of exposure to the nice home. The black woman in the nice home--she may not have it, but her kid is going to have it.

Chall: I see. She knows the difference.

Schechter: Oh, I have a friend--delightful gal. I was talking to her recently. She has three children--three boys are in college. Can you imagine, in this day and age, having three boys all at once at college? Her attitude is, "I'll walk the streets. I'll become a whore, but my kids are going to finish school." Fortunately, she doesn't have to, but this is how strong they feel. Somehow, this has not quite penetrated with the Mexican-American woman.

To a large extent, part of it is the men, the machismo, et cetera--they don't want their women outspoken. They want them meek, mild. But also the Catholic Church, I think, has played a large role there. I find that those areas where the Catholic Church is strong--the Irish, et cetera--that you find a more backward kind of a people. So there are different forces. I'm not blaming any one of them.

Project Head Start

Schechter: That's another reason why I feel that Project Head Start was so important. Because we recognized that to scream, at the college and university level, about the number of kids not coming in, is a little late. The time to do it is pre-school. Have them start at the starting line. You have to remember that, by and large, they do not speak English when they start school and it's the equivalent of throwing any child into a foreign school. You have to treat the Mexican-American as a foreign culture because it is. By the time they reach the sixth grade, they're drowning. They've never learned geography in the fourth grade. They never mastered the math, or arithmetic, or new math. They can't because it's a foreign language. By the time they develop a vocabulary large enough to begin to understand, they're so far back because they've already missed and dropped it.

Part of CSO's hue and cry has always been--with all the problems we were dealing with on an ongoing, everyday basis, and you had it--from wife beating to police brutality, to "we need a new sidewalk," or a sidewalk, or the traffic control--underlying it all has always been education. Education has always been the key. That's the real, real key.

Chall: And you feel you made some strides there?

Schechter: Yes, but that's down the drain. Because as of last September, it ceased to exist. I have one sister who is a teacher's aide in the Pasadena area and she was absolutely amazed at the

Schechter: dramatic difference. Because all of a sudden, instead of starting with, whatever you do in a kindergarten or first grade level, they now had to start teaching them the alphabet, how to count, just English. I mean [starting from] word one. Prior to this, Head Start had introduced them to basic English.

Chall: Head Start took care of all the children, then, at that stage?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Then the program went under?

Schechter: Under Nixon, it started to be phased out.

This is where Israel has a different philosophy. Israel, because they have a limited population, can't afford to lose one generation. If you want to compare influx of people. This is a melting pot? That is a melting pot. Except that they couldn't afford to lose one generation. You have the Yemenites, for example, who are as downtrodden, as ignorant as--well, they're just the equivalent of the blacks in the poorest country in Africa in terms of modern day technology, the kind of world we live in.

What they do is they bring into every home the high school kids; they assign them to a home. The Yemenite mother with seventeen kids is too tired, and is academically not qualified to teach. By the time that kid reaches high school, he's on a par with any other child in terms of, do I want to be a doctor, do I want to be a lawyer, whatever.

This is the kind of thing that is missing here. Even Project Head Start didn't match that. Because on an ongoing, daily basis, someone is helping you with your homework. I defy any child to go through school without help at home. At some level, at some point. And this is where they have had a tremendous impact, and they have not lost a generation.

Their parents may be as backward as the day they came into the country, but not the kids. By the time the kids reach college level, there's no such thing as not qualifying--the Baake case--that's what I'm talking about.

Chall: Did there ever develop factions in CSO, or were you pretty well able to keep that organization free of serious conflicts?

Schechter: Any organization, just like any family, is going to have a certain amount of squabbling, personality clashes. Any organization, whether it's the Republican party, Democratic party, a community

- Schechter: organization--and I think the Mexican-American more than any other because everyone wants to be chief. You'll find more chiefs than followers. I think CSO is one that really had the greatest impact in terms of grass roots.
- Chall: Did Alinsky and Ross provide you with the organizational know-how? Were they very important to the development of the CSO?
- Schechter: They were the backbone. They were absolutely the backbone.
- Chall: You needed their ability, their know-how?
- Schechter: You had to have someone there on an ongoing basis instead of everyone else who is involved with the job. We are not really yet a middle class society where you have some of the leisure and time to do these kinds of things. You really have to have someone to take care of the store on an ongoing basis.
- Chall: Were both of them there or just--
- Schechter: No. Ross. Alinsky always stayed in Chicago.
- Chall: Did he ever come out?
- Schechter: Not to my knowledge. Maybe just to visit, but not to stay and work.
- Chall: Besides the person just being there--you might have hired any number of people to be there--but--
- Schechter: But we couldn't hire because you're talking about money, and Ross was being paid by Chicago initially.
- Chall: Oh, I see.
- Schechter: They funded it. They paid the rent initially and supported the organization.
- Chall: What brought it about, do you have any idea?
- Schechter: Alinsky's interest in reaching out to different groups that needed help.
- Chall: Did they provide an organizational scheme and know-how, besides being there? Did Ross have a technique that was useful? Did he train others in it?

Schechter: I think he was very instrumental. I think we all benefited from it. I may have continued on, but a lot of them had never been exposed to an organized structure, and I think he provided it. He just had the know-how. I think that anyone who was under Saul Alinsky's wing had to have a certain knowledge of organizational structure and he certainly proved that he could reach out into the community and have a cross section. Even though it was grass roots, he was able to pull in some business people, so that you had professional people. You really had a balance, heavily oriented towards grass roots, but still a good cross section of professionals. So it was never totally grass roots, or totally business, or totally professional.

Chall: These other people were not necessarily Mexican-Americans, the professionals, or was it almost entirely Mexican-Americans?

Schechter: Almost entirely Mexican-Americans. Some help, like labor unions. Of course, while the actual members who attended the meetings were officers of unions, et cetera and were Mexican-Americans, you still had to involve their leadership from the different unions, in terms of helping us.

Ross also made it very nice. He would tie it in with functions, socials, so that it wasn't just always work, work, work.

Chall: For some of you, it must have been continual. I mean, in addition to your other work.

Schechter: Yes; he came in at a time when everyone was ready for it. As hard as I was working, many others were working just as hard. We all had to work full time at some job. He was like the catalyst that lit it.

Chall: How long did he stay with it?

Schechter: He stayed with it until about the mid-fifties.

Chall: I see. That wasn't very long. And you were able, then, to carry on?

It was through CSO, then, that you got this poverty program money? Did that come into the CSO or did you have to set up-- that's the Head Start--

Schechter: That came through another organization.

Chall: I understand that only East Los Angeles got all of the proposals which it asked for in terms of poverty program monies in those days of OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity].

Schechter: Yes. But primarily just the education of the pre-schooler, was really, to me, the crux of it all. Also participation by mothers. Part of it was to bring in the mothers to help. For the first time, you were able to bring in the mothers, because you could never really get them involved on an ongoing basis in PTA. Here, because maybe the child was too young and had to be taken, you could involve the mother and arrange for the mother, let's say, one day to have the neighbor take care of the other kids so she could spend time here. So that it exposed her, even at that level, in terms of education, and interested her, then, in terms of, now my child needs an education. For the first time, the mother is now involved.

Chall: Were any statistics kept on the children who went through this program?

The Youth Opportunities Foundation and Malabar School

Schechter: No. That's why I keep repeating, you know--I will go back to the fact that you can never measure the impact. For example, the Youth Opportunities Foundation received a grant from HEW at Malabar Grammar School, which is one of the 100% Mexican-American schools, to enrich the program.

Here, the classes were taught in Spanish, with a heavy emphasis on English as a foreign language. Each child, as they developed their fluency with English, was then shifted into a totally English-speaking class. In the meantime, they didn't lose the other classes, whatever class it was. You can't just draw a line and say, okay, you're all going to go into the total English class, because they develop at different stages. We were so successful that that year we were like, nationally, the one school where Johnny could read. It was successful. As I explained to you once before, we eventually lost the funding even though Robert Finch managed to let us have it while he was head of HEW.*

Now with the Youth Opportunities Foundation, we don't have that money available, as we did for Malabar Grammar School, so we're back again, just handling the high school graduate going

*See pages 15-16.

Schechter: into whatever school he wants. We have them at Harvard, we have them at Yale, we have them at Berkeley--you name it. How do you measure it? They're all over. Joe Aragon, special assistant to the president, who's on Carter's staff, was one of our kids. Just about all of them. You name them, they've all been through our program, Youth Opportunities Foundation. Municipal Court Judge Richard Montes, Ernesto Borunda, Antonio J. Mendez III, in San Antonio, Texas.

Chall: How did that money come to you, the Youth Opportunities Foundation? Did you go out and get it?

Schechter: Private industry. Some grants. Prudential Insurance, Lockheed, Thrifty Drug Stores, Alpha Beta Co., Atlantic Richfield, to name a few. They are contributing. Some labor money. We raised it among friends. Well-to-do people--

Chall: The usual fund raising.

Schechter: Yes. But primarily business. The members of the board are Francisco Bravo, M.D.; Felix Castro, Executive Director, Registered Professional Engineer; Philip M. Newman, Superior Court Judge; Edward R. Roybal, Member of Congress; Hope Mendoza Schechter; Ignacio E. Lozano, Jr., Publisher of La Opinion; and Carl S. Dentzel, Ph.D., Director, Southwest Museum.

Chall: What groups that you were working in, or were all of them, interested in the passage of the FEPC?

Schechter: Everyone.

Chall: Were you active in some organization dealing with the passage of FEPC or the appointment of the commission?

Schechter: I've always been a member of the state central committee, and the Democratic party certainly has always supported FEP. Yes, we were for housing and employment. FEPC was one of the rallying cries.

Chall: Did you ever do any work with the agricultural workers? Were you concerned with bettering their conditions or developing unions in the agricultural sphere, or were you mostly concerned with urban?

Schechter: Primarily because of distance, other than doing the usual. During the grape strike, none of our friends ever bought grapes. We helped raise some money. It was secondary--I mean, I was as concerned about it, but there were more immediate problems here. So nothing other than just the support of someone living in the city. I never went there and marched.

ABOUT THIS FOUNDATION

The Youth Opportunities Foundation is a non-profit, tax-exempt California corporation. Its purpose is to provide college scholarships to qualified students from the Spanish-speaking communities of California and to develop programs to improve education for the children from these communities.

Since its establishment in 1964, the Foundation has developed elementary, secondary and postsecondary programs. Over 3,000 college scholarship grants have been awarded to students from all parts of California.

Funding for these activities in excess of 2 million dollars has come principally from private sources.

The Foundation wishes to express its appreciation to all contributors, past and present. Special recognition is due the Louisa Watson Trust, The Ahmanson Foundation and CBS, Inc. for their recent major support.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Francisco Bravo, M.D.
Director-Founder, Bravo Clinic
Pan American Development Corp.

Ignacio El Lozano, Jr.
Publisher, La Opinion
Director, Bank of America

Felix Castro
Professional & Executive Search
Urban Development Associates

Philip M. Newman
Judge of the Superior Court
Los Angeles, California

Carl Dentzel, PhD
Director, Southwest Museum
Los Angeles, California

Edward R. Roybal
Congressman, 30th District
Los Angeles, California

Hope Mendoza Schechter
Los Angeles, California

Youth Opportunities Foundation

Executive Director
FELIX CASTRO



Post Office Box 45762/Suite 208
8820 South Sepulveda Boulevard
Los Angeles, California 90045

October 19, 1977

Board of Directors
FRANCISCO BRAVO, M.D.
Bravo Clinic and Bravo Ranches
FELIX CASTRO
Registered Professional Engineer
CARL S. DENTZEL, Ph.D.
Director, Southwest Museum
IGNACIO E. LOZANO, Jr.
U.S. Ambassador, El Salvador
PHILIP M. NEWMAN
Judge of the Superior Court
Los Angeles, California
EDWARD R. ROYBAL
Member of Congress
25th Congressional District
Los Angeles, California
HOPE MENDOZA SCHECHTER
Los Angeles, California

Telephone (213) 670-7664

CONTACT: FELIX CASTRO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Telephone: (213) 670-7664

YOF announces 1977 RECOGNITION AWARDS to five outstanding former grant recipients:

JOSEPH ARAGON, Special Assistant to the President
The White House, Washington D. C.
JD, University of Southern California
For outstanding achievement in GOVERNMENT

RALPH OCHOA, Chief Assistant to the Speaker
Legislature, Sacramento, California
JD, UCLA
For outstanding achievement in GOVERNMENT

HONORABLE RICHARD MONTES, Judge of the Municipal Court
Alhambra Judicial District, Alhambra, California
JD, Loyola Marymount University
For outstanding achievement in the LAW

MOCTESUMA ESPARZA
Moctesuma Esparza Productions
MFA, UCLA
For outstanding achievement in MOTION PICTURES

ARMANDO LOPEZ, JR., Associate Executive Director
LAC/USC Medical Center
MA, University of Southern California
For outstanding achievement in HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATION

YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES FOUNDATION
CURRENT CONTRIBUTORS

Louisa Watson Trust Fund

The Ahmanson Foundation

CBS, Inc.

AID United Givers	The Douglas Aircraft W. Foundation
Monogram Foundation	MCA, Inc.
Joseph W. Drown	Pacific Telephone
Safeway Stores, Inc.	R. C. Baker Foundation
Beneficial Standard Life Ins. Co.	Atlantic Richfield Foundation
Southern California Edison Co.	Host International, Inc.
Max Factor Family Foundation	Bing Fund
The Aerospace Corporation	Di Giorgio Foundation
Rockwell International	The Essick Foundation, Inc.
Standard Brands Paint Co.	Alpha Beta Company
San Diego Federal S & L	The Upjohn Company
Morris & Mary Press Foundation	The Setzer Foundation
American Safety Equipment Corp.	El Paseo Inn
Milo W. Bekins Foundation	Prudential Insurance
McGraw-Hill, Inc.	Thrifty Drug Stores
Avery International	Victor M. Carter
The Colwell Company	Beckman Instruments
Avco Financial Services	Lockheed Leadership Fund
Norris Industries	Frank Webb
American Medical International	Continental Airlines
Crown Zellerbach Foundation	Judge Ronald George
Consolidated Freightways, Inc.	General Telephone Co.
California Federal S & L	Carnation Company

Chall: I'm thinking of even in the fifties, before Chavez--I'm thinking of that period of Bracero, or pre-Bracero period.

Schechter: That's all part of the immigration thing. There was always an ongoing interest in helping them stabilize their remaining in this country. Because they were going to stay here anyway. The children were all American citizens. Some were interested in having them remain here. One of the problems was if the husband gets deported, then the wife, who's pregnant, and usually an American citizen, then has to stay here and go on welfare with the kids. You have the problem now of depriving the children of a father and then having to go on the dole. I'd rather fight to keep the father here.

Chall: That was something the CSO was doing at the time, too.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Were you familiar with a woman named Catalina Estrada in Northern California, who had an organization called the Blue Cross? She was president of it in the fifties. In a letter that she wrote, which we found in Governor [Edmund G.] Brown's file, she claimed that the Blue Cross had 50,000 to 60,000 members, and they provide economic and legal help to the Mexican-Americans. She wrote to Pat Brown, offering to support him when he was running for attorney-general. I've never heard of this organization or even Catalina Estrada.

Schechter: I don't remember it or her, but if it is Northern California, the Tehachapis are really the cutting edge in terms of political action. It's like two states. I don't know if you got into that with the battles--but there is always a rivalry. We love Democrats but we hated northern Democrats. We're always battling. They always want to determine who our southern chairman is, or who our southern secretary is, and there's always a battle. On issues, we're together.

The Media in the Mexican-American Community

Schechter: I'm not saying that we fought with other Mexican-American organizations. There was this lack of communication.

Another thing, down here we have a Mexican newspaper, La Opinion. La Opinion is a Mexican paper written in Spanish, and it is really a Mexican paper. It does not involve itself

Schechter: with American politics. It literally endorses Mexican candidates because of the number of citizens, Mexican citizens, here, who vote in Mexican elections. So they endorse Mexican candidates.

Chall: I see. How do these people vote? By sort of an absentee ballot?

Schechter: Probably. Or go down to vote.

Chall: So that really keeps them in touch with their roots rather than helping them to assimilate?

Schechter: Because I wanted to remain fluent in Spanish, I spoke Spanish. I didn't have one word of English when I started grammar school. One of the contributing factors why I became a drop-out was a language barrier. I felt I was slipping back and slipping back, and drowning in school because I, like all the other kids, never really mastered classes on the grammar school level. I was going to make a point.

Chall: About La Opinion? Is that a paper that's printed in Mexico?

Schechter: No, it's printed here.

Chall: It's printed here, but it deals primarily with the issues of Mexico. Is that the only Mexican press, or Spanish-speaking press in this area?

Schechter: No, there are now a couple of others but they are limited in their influence. But that's the one that's been here the longest. God knows, it's been here before I was here. But it also has a tremendous impact in the community.

I'll never forget, when I was working for the union, for one short period I was in Arizona. I think it was six months. I was state representative for my union in the state of Arizona, and I lived there--in Tucson. I was commuting on weekends, every other weekend, back home. I remember La Opinion. I've always worked very closely with La Opinion. They ran a story when I was going to go to Arizona, and would you believe it? I would go visit people at their homes or in their factories--they already knew about me. They would call me by my name. They showed me--they had my picture, so they knew me. This is the impact that you have.

Chall: Everybody who can read Spanish, here is reading it? It doesn't give them a feeling for the United States?

Schechter: No. All it does is reinforce.

Then you also have four Mexican-American radio stations. When I am in my car, and I spend a lot of time in my car, because I want to maintain my fluency in Spanish, that's the only program I have on--any one of those four stations.

I couldn't tell you a thing about an American station. I watch the news at six o'clock in English. Then they have their own channel, KMEX, channel 34--movies, Mexican TV.

Anyway, I can tell you all about what happened in Chile in terms of who won what game--you know, the soccer game, et cetera. I'm amazed when sometimes we'll win an international championship. I don't hear about it in the paper.

Chall: Not locally.

Schechter: Locally, no. I know about it because I listen to the Spanish language radio. We are insulated.

Chall: So even if people can vote with a bilingual ballot, it's uncertain how much they know about what's going on in their own community.

Schechter: Yes. They're very reluctant about spreading their wings. I'm really generalizing because I'm not saying we don't have a great number of kids coming through, and you do have a lot of them now interested in going on to higher education one way or the other, and doing it.

But you still have this tremendous, tremendous number of people who have no idea of what's available to them, have no idea that they can break out, and are afraid, still, to come across beyond Broadway.

Problems of Current Immigration

Schechter: Here in the valley [San Fernando] there seems to be a tremendous number of Mexican-Americans now moving in. I shouldn't say Mexican-Americans; they speak only Spanish. So that Dixie Canyon Elementary School in Sherman Oaks now is sending out letters--that's the grammar school--the one that's immediately close to here--requesting Spanish-speaking aides. Will we volunteer? Will we come in? This never happened before. Because they're poor--

Schechter: they don't have automobiles, a lot of them--so the visibility is tremendous. They're the ones waiting at the buses. All of a sudden you get the feeling that this is a Mexican-American community because they're on foot. So you see them.

Chall: How are they moving in? Where are they living?

Schechter: In the major streets. The major streets have apartment houses and this is where they're living. And you know that they're probably crowded--there'd have to be more than one family in an apartment--just based on rents and knowing what they're earning.

Chall: What's going to be the solution, do you think, to this influx?

Schechter: I don't know. Carter's wrestling with the problem of immigration. I think the Mexican government is the one that's going to have to solve it, but they're not going to solve it because they have to admit their own economy can't support their own people. They don't have the money. The population explosion in Mexico is out-running its economic growth. Mexico is the only country that refused the Peace Corps. In spite of their being, according to our standards, a backward country, in terms of the rest of South America, they would never admit that they need help. So they never accepted the Peace Corps and they never will. There's an expression, amor proprio, self-love, pride, love of that which is proper, and they will not admit they need help and won't accept it.

This is also part of the problem with the program that you have on a college or university level, where you have the "dumb-bell" English class, where they won't avail themselves of it because then they have to admit that they don't know English grammar. And it's a matter of pride. It's like cutting off your nose, but go tell them that!

Representation in Government and Politics

Chall: There's a lot of work to be done by role models like you.

Did you get involved with MAPA [Mexican American Political Association]? That was a different kind of an organization--organized in 1959.

Schechter: Yes, I was a member, I would say until five years ago.

Chall: And what did you find that was good and not good about MAPA? Why did you drop your membership?

Schechter: I dropped my membership because I never could get them to stop using my husband's name. He must remain apolitical. ##

Chall: I guess its program was not as broad as--

Schechter: CSO. No.

Chall: And it had one goal. And that was to elect Mexican-Americans into government.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Regardless of anything except the fact that they were Mexican-Americans, is my understanding. Is that so, do you think?

Schechter: [sighs] The biggest problem is it could never, never limit the number of candidates. In many instances, they could have won races. Where there's a concentration of Mexican-Americans, the only important race is the primary. If you win that primary, you're in. For example, where [Jack R.] Fenton--that's the old fifty-first William L. Munnell district--that should really have a Mexican-American representative. Why isn't it? God forbid, more than five don't file. If they narrowed it down to one, they can win, and this happens in every race.

Chall: It's interesting. The black communities in their early political years, in Berkeley and Oakland, and maybe down here, too, organized, and solved that problem simply by refusing to back more than one candidate.

Schechter: They're better organized and can knock a few heads together.

Chall: They can't always agree anymore, but in the earlier years they would get together in order to select that one candidate.

Schechter: Every single race in which you have been able to do this you stand a good chance of winning. When [George E.] Danielson won--there's another instance where all you have to do is win the primary. Two Mexicans ran. Combined, could have won--combining the votes of the two Mexican-Americans who ran, one could have won. Danielson won. Had they run one candidate and really solidified.... But you can't get them to do it.

Chall: You can't get them to agree on--

Schechter: --one candidate. Were I not living hereOne of the criticisms is that many of us move out. Mine is a very selfish reason.

Chall: You have a mixed marriage and you wouldn't expect to be living in the Mexican community.

Schechter: But I still would have moved out. While I maintained my registration at my mother's house, I was living in an apartment on the west side. I was still working and spending all my time over there [east side], but when I went to sleep, it was on the west side. Why should you live in a poor area if you can now afford a nicer area and you want to be more comfortable?

Everyone's thrust is to better themselves. My main goal, of course, was to move out of a ghetto--which I think is a healthier situation. Yet, you have this other group. Jimmy Cruz --who's still with the Bricklayers Union--whenever he sees me, will always make a crack about "you moved out." So from time to time I get a dig, and I say, "Well I may have moved out, but when you need me, I'm here. Financially, you need the body, I'm still here." I'm still active in the Mexican-American community, but I don't know why I have to sacrifice comfort when they're getting just as much help as they would have--and more than the average woman does give in terms of time, money, et cetera.

Chall: But where they are concentrated and could elect somebody, they can't. Do you feel that MAPA wasn't able to handle that situation?

Schechter: I don't think they're big enough, and strong enough, and have enough muscle to be that effective. They get so involved in fighting over who's going to be chairman that they never really get down to the reason they were formed. If you've ever been a club member, you remember the big fights you get into in terms of who's going to be chairman, and then no one ever really takes care of the store in terms of electing a good candidate you want to elect.

Chall: That's rather serious.

Schechter: It's still going on. It's still an ongoing organization, but....

Chall: But it isn't effective then?

Schechter: No, not in terms of electing, because there's no reason why we shouldn't have someone on the Los Angeles City Council; there's no reason why we shouldn't have more congressmen. Numerically, even if they just concentrated on registering--even with two

Schechter: running--if they concentrated on registering, they could probably pull it off. But I don't know of anyone who's really putting on a registration drive such as we did in the early days of CSO. I don't know that anyone is doing that kind of leg work. Because it's hard work, it really is.

Chall: Yes, it is hard work.

The Californians for Liberal Representation, backed, and as I understand it, helped organize a community convention in 1967, [reading notes] of over two hundred Mexican-American organizations to decide on a Mexican for the open seat on the L.A. school board.

Schechter: That was when--

Chall: Richard Calderon was on the CLR board and they chose Julian Nava. They got behind him and backed him. Calderon was chairman of the finance committee. Nava did win that election. Did you consider that the work of the CLR was important in this election?

Schechter: He's a CSO man, too.

Chall: Calderon--Nava?

Schechter: Nava.

Chall: Were you aware of the Californians for Liberal Representation in this campaign?

Schechter: I was in his campaign. I worked very hard for Nava.

Chall: Do you recall that convention?

Schechter: I didn't attend, but I recall....

Chall: Now, that was done by communities on the outside of the Mexican community, who helped them organize, which apparently was successful.

Schechter: Yes, and were able to have one run, and once again, won.

Chall: I guess in '70, CLR endorsed both Riles and Nava for state superintendent of public instruction, so that neither one got total backing. In 1971, that was the year when there was a reapportionment measure up. Then a coalition, worked with the Mexican community to put together a Coalition for Fair Reapportionment, which had the blessings of the Democrats and

Chall: Republicans and the churches, to provide an opportunity for better representation for the Mexican-American community. And Herman Sillas was the chairman. Have you worked with him?

Schechter: Yes. I started out with him years back. I know Herman Sillas very well. When I had my own business, he was one of my clients.

Chall: So there are some groups, that were not Mexican, working in the community trying to help.

Schechter: Oh, there are many and every one with a common goal.

Chall: Were you ever active with the Californians for Liberal Representation? Have you worked with that group?

Schechter: No. When you talk about being involved, I have to be involved in politics here, in my own district now, if I want to stay on the state central committee. We just finished a dinner for assembly majority leader Howard Berman. Howard Berman appoints me to the state central committee, and so we just had his fund-raising dinner three weeks ago. I was active in his first campaign and have been active ever since.

I've been active in every campaign wherever I happen to be living. I sold three tables.

Chall: That takes a lot of work.

Schechter: It takes a lot of work, and I'm still working, and I have my ongoing activities with Youth Opportunities Foundation. Tony Rios will still call up and say, hey, we need, whatever, or do this, or thus, and so. There are just so many hours in a day. And there are so many organizations cropping up here and there that you just can't touch bases with all of them other than peripherally. You help, but not with the....I had time before. When I was not married. It's a whole different story when you are married and want to maintain a home life and a professional career. My work is not nine to five, five days a week. I work evenings and week ends.

Meshing Family, Career, and Political Activities

Schechter: I have this little boy that has really become my top priority. He needs help. I have, to a large extent, cut out all night

Schechter: meetings. With Mom (my husband's mother) here six months out of the year, this has eliminated some of that problem.* Harvey has a lot of night meetings. I don't like to leave a child here alone. Even if it's with a baby sitter, or, with the live-in maid that I had for a while, I don't like to leave him alone, because I think he needs the stability of having someone here. It's surprising how your whole life changes--you have to shift gears and live a different kind of a life.

So, being an activist, I now have to call my shots in terms of where I'm going to be and when.

Chall: How long had you been married before he came to live with you, this little nephew? [Bruce Zinda]

Schechter: Let's see, I got married in '55; he was born in '64; he came when he was four and a half. Fourteen years.

Chall: So that you had already established a pattern and you had to change it.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Particularly because he was so young, too.

Schechter: Yes. Well, you have had children, so you can understand and appreciate that certain things have to go, and they do. The decline in my activity has, to a large measure, been due to Bruce, because, before that, I could still be more active. I'm still more active than the average woman.

Chall: Yes.

Schechter: But not to the extent.... You know, when you get married, a certain amount has to give. Then once a child comes into the house, a certain amount still has to give more, especially since I worked full time.

Chall: Tell me about your career--what you went into after the union. You married in 1955?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: And did you leave the union then?

*Mrs. Dora Schechter, of New York, lives six months each year with the Harvey Schechters.

Schechter: December 31, 1955.

Chall: Why did you leave the union then?

Schechter: I found that my satisfaction with the union was no more....I could see I was not going to go any place. No way. No way could you aspire. I don't mind working hard, if I see a glimmer of light on the horizon; if I see I'm going some place. But I wasn't going to go any place because the structure of the union was such that there was no chance for anyone, locally, to attain a position of power or any meaningful position.

Chall: Regardless of whether you were a man or a woman, it wouldn't have happened?

Schechter: No. And then the pay scale wasn't one that thrilled me. Even though it had improved, it still wasn't what I thought I should be getting. I was aware of what other representatives were getting.

Chall: In other unions?

Schechter: In other unions, et cetera. No way could I match that kind of an income. I was ambitious enough to want to make a little more money, so I just left the union, and then thrashed around for about six months, became a secretary at the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] in the office. In the meantime I had gone to school. Sawyer Business School.

Harvard University and the union taught me that education was important, so between all my activity, I found time to enroll in L.A. City College, enroll at UCLA, a class here, a class there. I had the equivalent of about two years' college, all for credit because of the classes that I'd taken here and there.

After I got married, my husband pointed out, that with all my college, I still didn't have a high school diploma. That's when I found out that the only way I could get one was to go to night school, or go full time during the day. I chose to go at night because I wanted to continue working. So I had to go five nights.

I was able to take elimination exams, let's say in civics, literature, Spanish, areas where I felt I was strong enough. I got A's, and therefore could minimize the number of classes I had to take to graduate. So I was able to do that last year in one year of night school. I already told you I was valedictorian of my class

Chall: Of your night school class.

Establishing a Career as a Court Reporter, 1958

Schechter: Of my night school class. I graduated from Hollywood High School. We got Georgianna Hardy, who was then chairman of the board of education, to be our speaker. I arranged for her to speak. I knew her. Then once again, even with my high school diploma, I really wasn't prepared to take a job. I could have gone to work for another union, but I didn't want that any more.

Like any professional kind of a job, it would have meant a lot of night work, going out of town, weekend work, et cetera. By now I had shifted gears and didn't really want to do that, so at a cocktail party one night, I ran into the daughter of a friend, who was a court reporter. I had never even heard of the field. She told me all about it; I became interested, and by good luck, I already had my high school diploma. That's one of the requisities. You have to go to school for a minimum of two years. I did the required number of years, passed all the tests, and then became certified. It's like CPA, called CSR, certified shorthand reporter, so I'm now a certified shorthand reporter.

Chall: Did you learn to do it on a stenotype machine right from the start?

Schechter: Yes, oh yes.

Chall: And it's two years. How many hours a week was it?

Schechter: I went days and nights.

Chall: Days and nights. For two years?

Schechter: Yes. I went two nights a week, and all day--from eight o'clock till two--every day. It's a hard grind. Really, I was fortunate, because we have a higher rate of attrition than does even the medical profession. You either can do it or you cannot. It's just one of those fields that's really really difficult to master. It has nothing to do with how bright you are, really.

Chall: It's partly--

Schechter: Well, part of being bright, coordination, putting it all together. Then, as soon as I became certified, I went into business for myself.

Chall: How did you do that?

Schechter: I knew a lot of attorneys. The attorneys become your clients.

Chall: They bring you into the court, then?

Schechter: No, no, no. We do depositions.

Chall: Oh, I see.

Schechter: We do depositions. We go to the attorneys' offices and do depositions. Like tomorrow, I'm going to be in Westwood all day.

Chall: I see. You're not in the court. You don't stay in the court.

Schechter: No, that's too structured. I could never go to a political convention. You only get your vacation when the judge decides you're going to take your vacation. This way it lends itself to a lot of flexibility, and with my activity, I have to do that. I'll work very, very hard, but when I want off, I want off. So I'm able to call the shots in terms of when I'm off, and how long I'm off, and what I'm doing. Even during the day, if I want to I can attend a political luncheon, or a political meeting, in town, whatever. You can't really do this in the court--say to the judge, "I'm leaving at eleven; I'll be back at three." You can't do it.

Chall: Now, when you have a business, do you have other people working with you?

Schechter: I had other reporters working for me, yes.

Chall: Do you have now?

Schechter: No, I merged it with another agency in '73. My husband has an aortic lesion; he's had it since he was seven years old. They call them "cripples who do not limp." They operate within this level, so they can never become over exerted. He, under medication, is able to control it. Because he got it at seven, he learned, at an early age, how to live with this affliction. He has to eat regularly, sleep, nap, can work, but that's it. It's all he can do is just do his job. He's now the regional director for the Pacific Southwest.

Chall: For the Anti-Defamation League?

Schechter: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Chall: That's a big job.

Schechter: Yes, and with a lot of--

Chall: Stress in that, isn't there?

Schechter: Yes. That's one of the reasons why--that's all he can do. He's as bad as I am in terms of being a compulsive worker. We're both workaholics. He will be up at five o'clock in the morning, four o'clock in the morning. If he has a night meeting, I always make sure that he takes a nap--takes precedence even over eating, because rest is more important.

They never learn to walk upstairs. They have to take one step, count to ten, next step, count to ten. He just does it automatically. It's just marvelous, really, in terms of the adjustment that he's gone through. He'll probably outlive me.

Anyway, in '73 he had a setback. It was really a bad setback, and they never developed his surgery. Once you pass forty, with his condition, they have to wait until you're in a very extreme situation. In failure, literally, before they will even attempt it, because it's too dangerous. Anyway, the setback in '73. I was the victim of my own success. My agency thrived, and I was making a lot of money, and increasing, and renting more space. Really a gung-ho organization. It's the first time I've heard of someone going out of business because they were too successful, but I literally had to.

What happened was, like the average businessman, I would call home and say--this is during the period that I had the live-in maid, so at least I had someone feeding Bruce--I couldn't come home. Just like the businessman, you know, calls, and "Sorry, I won't be home for dinner."

Then, if I was home, my phone was going constantly. There's a tremendous shortage of reporters, and it was not unheard of me to be up till eleven o'clock at night trying to find a reporter, because over and above my staff, I would have this call for extra help. One day you could have ten depositions, and the next time, twenty. When you only have ten reporters on staff, how are you going to cover? You have to call around to the agencies or the reporters. Maybe a reporter from a courtroom has taken a day off, whatever, you've got to get it covered.

It was too much for him. There was no change of pace when he'd come home. The doctor pointed out that his setback was really due to my not giving him a change of pace. And he needed a relaxed atmosphere when he came home and not the uptight situation which I had created. And I defy anyone to be in business and a success....

- Schechter: In the meantime, I've never cut back on my Mexican-American activity, and never given up on my politics, et cetera, so that has always been hectic. Very, very hectic. So I would say within two months I was out of business. I'm associated, so it means that I still get a percentage of all the accounts that I brought with me. I work as a reporter, which I did before anyway. As I say, there's a real shortage and so you all work.
- Chall: But now you work on your own. You're a free-lance reporter in your own business, is that it?
- Schechter: No, no, no. I'm associated with the business. I merged my business with another firm. They handle all administrative matters. I work for them and I get a percentage of the business from the accounts I had brought with me. I found that tax-wise, et cetera, it was better for me to incorporate. I, as a deposition reporter, am now incorporated. So that really I'm a walking corporation. My friends tease my husband about sleeping with a corporation.
- Chall: Are you in an office by yourself? Or are you still assigning and staffing ten people?
- Schechter: No, no, no. Now the agency handles that. That's exactly what I needed to have done. Somebody else has the headache of handling the whole thing. I don't have to worry about getting reporters to cover jobs; collections, cash flow, payroll, et cetera.
- Chall: That's not your responsibility.
- Schechter: No longer my responsibility. I do have an office.
- Chall: And you take your own assignments?
- Schechter: And I take my own assignments, and I will select which reporters will cover some accounts, et cetera, because certain attorneys, or a handful, speak at a rate of three hundred words a minute. I want to make sure that the reporter can handle the job. Just like in the legal profession, or your profession, or doctors, there are good, mediocre, bad--and I want to be sure. Some, it doesn't matter, because anyone can handle PI, personal injury. You can write it in your sleep. But once you get into a technical area--I do mostly technical stuff. Like I handle the Chrysler account--the product liability. I've got the automotive encyclopedia. I think it's a very humbling field. Every day you know you don't know everything. No way. It's an engineer one day, it's a doctor one day, it's an entymologist another day. It's a whole new world.

Chall: It's interesting, isn't it?

Schechter: Yes. Or it has to do with copyright.

Chall: Patents?

Schechter: Patents. You name it.

Chall: How many hours do you put in this job?

Schechter: You have to remember that in between all this, I'm doing other things too. I get up at six-thirty. I stop dictating at ten-thirty at night, because I have to--between phones ringing, et cetera--it literally pushes me into working till ten-thirty at night, and I work Saturday and I work Sunday.

Chall: Oh, you do?

Schechter: I work a seven-day-week. Seventy to eighty hours a week.

Chall: But--

Schechter: But I don't have to, if I didn't have all the other things going. Wherever Bruce wants to go, I take him. In the meantime, I have a certain level of income I want to maintain. We're not on a salary. We get paid by the page and the number of copies ordered. It is "piece work." We only earn money when we work. Over and above the fact that I do get a stipend or percentage for whatever accounts I have, but we're not on salary. So I have, arbitrarily, determined what I want to earn a year and so, while I say I quit at ten-thirty, sometimes I will work as late as two-thirty in the morning.

Chall: You have to transcribe all your notes.

Schechter: We dictate.

Chall: Oh, is that how you do it?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: You take it on a stenotype--

Schechter: --and then you dictate it. And then you proof it, so it's really three different steps.

Chall: And then somebody transcribes your dictation?

Schechter: Yes. It's a special field unto itself. They're called transcribers.

Chall: I see.

Schechter: It's a fascinating field. It's one that's not well known. We've had to put on a tremendous educational program. On top of that, they've now come up with the continuing education for doctors, lawyers--well now they have it for us too. I think they add to the CSR something like PRP--professional something or other--fancy-schmantzy titles.

But it means that out of a year, there are so many hours I have to put into continuing education.

Chall: What does that mean in your job here?

Schechter: In my job, it's really a refresher course on grammar, a refresher course on vocabulary, spelling, laws--their impact on our field. I'm past president of the Court Reporters Association. I've been a director statewide. I finally gave up on it all because it just takes too much time. Now I'm the legislative representative for this area, because that's my forte. It doesn't do any good to have someone who doesn't know the legislators as I do. So I help them in that sense. Then any time they need a bill, help on a bill, most of the time I'm the one who has had the bill introduced and then testified before the committee, et cetera.

You talk about FEPC. I was up at the hearings at Sacramento when they were being heard. And I spoke on behalf of FEP. I spoke on behalf of the Rumford Fair Housing Act. You just change the title of the bill. I know how to handle the bill from the time you introduce the bill, it gets thrown into the hopper, on down to the day of hearing, what goes on behind the scenes--you really win or lose a bill in committee.

If you wait to fight a bill, whether for or against, pro/con, the day it's being voted on, you've lost it or won it, either way, because it's really in committee that counts. It doesn't mean that you don't have to mobilize your forces for the final vote on the bill before either the senate or assembly, but what really counts is the committee, because if you want a bill killed, you don't want a second fight involving a larger group of legislators. We deal primarily with either the committee on Finance, Insurance and Commerce, or judiciary.

Chall: In your field? In court reporting?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: What kind of problems are they concerned with that would bring the court reporters into the legislature?

Schechter: Everything we do is mandated by the legislature. Our pay rates, everything that impacts on us. We're notary publics, too. So that we're constantly in the battle as it impacts on our field. It's amazing the number of battles and even among ourselves. One of the battles that I'm involved with now is one that we fought, I would say six years ago, where we tried to get.... I won't go into details other than we tried, statewide, to get all the court reporters to get together on this one bill, and they wouldn't. It was a very crucial bill and they couldn't see it. It was one of these, where, a few years ahead, you had to see the handwriting on the wall. At that moment, they couldn't see it. It's like trying to organize a worker. Right now, it's a little rough, but if you stick together, you're going to have a union that's going to be better.

They couldn't see it, and so what we did, was we introduced it just for the County of Los Angeles. Now, six or seven years later, they realize that what I said was true. So what we did was have the bill introduced. I went up to Sacramento. [Robert] Moretti was then speaker of the assembly. I had him introduce the bill. He literally turned the file over to me. Then we had the vote. No question. By the time we got there. But that's just one of the many bills that we worked on. I've always been there, whether it's been civil rights, housing, or....

Chall: An organization's liaison with the legislature?

Schechter: Yes. So I've had a lot of experience, fortunately, with my diverse interests, I've had a lot of exposure to it. It's been fun; I really enjoy it. It's very rewarding.

Chall: I think we're just about out of tape. I had wanted to get some background on your marriage to Harvey Schechter, to find out how it came about.

Schechter: Okay. He was with the UCLA Industrial Relations Department. He was doing his graduate work at UCLA. So it all meshed.

Chall: I see. And you were there, too?

Schechter: I was with the ILGWU. His thesis had to do with the organizational structure of the ILGWU. So he came to the ILGWU from the Industrial Relations Department, and then got assigned one week to each business agent, one week to each organizer, et cetera; so for one week, he was assigned to me. From this evolved our mutual interest, and I ended up signing him up for life.

Schechter: As a matter of fact, when he left UCLA, he had two immediate offers that were both very important ones. One was with Mattel Toys and the other was with the ADL. It was because of my work with the union that he went with ADL, because we felt that, mutually, we both would benefit from it, in the sense that we would continue with the same kinds of friends and interests in common.

[Interview 3: March 21, 1978]##

Chall: It's fortunate that you can work together this way. That each likes what the other is doing.

Schechter: You didn't have the tape on before?

Chall: No, I didn't.

Schechter: I was commenting that my husband's position is one that's a marriage of a job and an avocation--that he thoroughly enjoys it, because he gets to do both, at the same time, and gets paid. Also, we're both so active in the community. We both understand the problems of two people who are activists, so, as I mentioned before, we can arrive at a function, whether it's politics, or one involving his field of endeavor, and we arrive together and leave together. In between, he feels absolutely free to talk to anyone. He'll totally ignore me the whole evening long because he has to. Then, when I go to a political function, I totally ignore him, and he understands, because we both are involved in similar--even though the goals are perhaps a little different, it's still one of being active and having to talk to people. I find that the bulk of your work does get done at social functions anyway, whether it's fund raising, or the next program that you have outlined to implement. So it works very nicely for us.

Chall: And you have enough mutual friends in each group so that if you go to a B'nai B'rith function, you don't feel left alone in a corner somewhere?

Schechter: No. He doesn't have the nagging wife and I don't have the nagging husband, and it works out beautifully, because we both understand each other very well in that sense.

Chall: And that's been from the beginning, when you made your choice about where he was going to work, and what you were going to be doing?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: When you decided to marry, and then did, I know that Ed Roybal got some flack from the Catholic Church because his wife participated in the wedding. What about your mutual families? How did they accept this?

Schechter: My mother's concern was that I was not marrying a Mexican-American, and so, since in the past, some members of our family who had married into racially mixed families, had encountered some discrimination, her main concern was that I would have that problem. Well, by this time, I had already become an activist and was fully aware of what my rights were, so I assured her that I would have no problem. Oh, she started out by saying--the typical mother--what does he do for a living? He trained in sociology. For a woman who has had no background in terms of the academic field, the word sociology, even translated into Spanish, has no meaning whatsoever to her. So I tried to explain to her that he, because of his background and training, could anticipate problems, and help solve them, and that he had learned the techniques of how to handle different problems--could forecast, in some instances, a problem as it evolved. I went into quite a bit of explanation because she really didn't understand the word, sociology.

With her background, since she'd switched from Catholicism to Protestantism, she looked at me and said, "Oh, a prophet." [laughter] This to her was just crystal clear. I was marrying a prophet.

They really took to him. He, of course, had had four years of Spanish; so he had a thorough grounding in Spanish. While maybe he did not enunciate words correctly, he was able to communicate, and over the years, of course, has learned to master it a little bit better in terms of fluency. He can understand and read it very well. His problem was, that never having had the opportunity to practice Spanish, slang words he did not understand. These he quickly learned from the rest of the family.

No, there really was no problem. Their only concern was one of my facing discrimination. I think my husband's family had a bigger....

Chall: I wondered about him, yes.

Schechter: They reacted beautifully. His father was an old-time Socialist. He even ran for state senate in New York. He was the soapbox orator type and with a very liberal orientation. As he grew older, he became more religious, and more provincial in his thinking, so that when Harvey's letters started to come home,

Schechter: and more and more mentioned the name Hope Mendoza, his father finally wrote and said, "Is it one of the old line famous Sephardic Mendoza family?" And Harvey said, "No, wrong Mendoza."

By this time, in New York, you already had the tremendous influx of Puerto Ricans, et cetera. I must say they were magnificent. When we went back to visit, his mother--they both--introduced me to all the friends, all the family, and treated me like one of the family, even though, I'm sure, in back of the minds of some of the more bigoted kinds of relatives and friends, they might have been thinking it's really just a California-Puerto Rican type that he married. But in terms of their ever articulating it, there has never been anything like that demonstrated to me. It's been total acceptance.

My mother-in-law's a short woman and very heavyset. Her ideal has always been a tall, slender woman. She took one look at me and loved me because I was tall and I was slim. Whether I could cook, or couldn't cook, didn't really matter because I typified her ideal of what a woman should look like.

Chall: I see. Even if you weren't Jewish. [laughs]

Schechter: Yes. I did take instruction. I would not go all the way in terms of the mikva [ritual bath]. But this was primarily my hang-up. Most of your Jewish religious background is really one of tradition. This was my main interest. We were married by a rabbi under the chuppa [wedding canopy] which, to my family, was very decorative and colorful. They had never seen a chuppa before.

Chall: Here in Los Angeles?

Schechter: Yes. At a friend's home. We deliberately picked a day when CDC [California Democratic Council] was having a convention in Fresno, because, working for a labor union, there's no way I could have....We had to cut down on whom we were going to invite because we didn't have much money. We picked that day because we knew that everyone of labor, that I knew, that I would have invited, would have been in Fresno. In the Democratic party, the same way. Anyone I would have invited--and there's no way I could have started drawing the line--they would all have been in Fresno.

B'nai B'rith people he explained away, by telling them it was just a family affair, which is something they could understand. There were two people that we did want to invite from B'nai B'rith. What we did was we got married at the home of one of them, so there was no way she couldn't be invited. The other one could play the piano beautifully; so she's the one who played the piano at our wedding. So it worked out very nicely.

Chall: I see. So there wasn't any problem.

Schechter: There weren't any hurt feelings, which is what we were trying to avoid.

Chall: And no problems with the family. That really helps you start out with a very good feeling all around.

Schechter: Yes, when there's no friction.

Chall: And the fact that you had reared enough children in your own family, and you had high educational standards, means that, I would guess, there isn't any conflict between you on the rearing of your nephew.

Schechter: No.

Chall: Even though your backgrounds are different and could create problems.

Schechter: He wants to become Jewish. We have discouraged it until he reaches an age when he feels more responsible. I don't want to, at this point, just because he loves Harvey, and many of our friends are Jewish, socially, et cetera--I don't feel that he really can understand the dimensions in terms of saying I want to be Jewish.

I go to temple twice a year. This is my one commitment: I go twice a year to temple, or three times I think it is--the high holy days. So we have not encouraged Bruce in any way, shape, or form. We explained to him that if he wants to, when he gets older, he may, but at this stage it's just a little too early for him to make that kind of a decision.

Chall: Does he go to Sunday school or anything like that?

Schechter: No.

Chall: He's had no instruction?

Schechter: Has no instruction in any--I am areligious, so there's never been any--no training whatsoever.

Chall: Well, he can always get it if he wants to.

Schechter: That's my feeling.

Chall: And there are books around that he can read for the history when he wants to.

Schechter: If he really showed an inclination, other than the Jewish orientation, I would. But here never has been, so I have never felt the need.

Chall: Mainly, it's getting him broadly educated.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: He's a fortunate young boy.

Notable Leaders in the Mexican-American Community##

Chall: You have discussed the fact that, in the Mexican-American community, there weren't the leaders over a long period of time, that there have been in the black community. But I wondered if there had been any that you would refer to as sort of your heroes or heroines, or better perhaps, role models in the community. I don't know too many names, but I have picked up a few. Of course, in this area, I guess one of the most prominent persons early was Ed Roybal.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: These are just a few names that I've come across either locally or nationally and you might just comment on them in terms of their leadership roles, whether they could be considered models to the upcoming generation.

Grace Montañez Davis.

Schechter: Yes, yes. She has been active for many, many years. She came from--is it George Brown, the congressman, who's now up in the northern part and was originally from down here? The one who campaigned against Carmen?

Chall: Oh, he's a Southern California congressman. George Brown.

Schechter: He was. He's now up north someplace. Or the middle part of the state. Riverside. He took Tunney's position. He's now a congressman from that area [Thirty-sixth Congressional District]. That was then--it was part of the Nineteenth Congressional District, my district, but it was part of the Forty-fifth Assembly District then. And I was in the Fifty-first. I came in contact with her [Davis] because I was usually co-chairperson of the state central committee and was in charge of making sure that every assembly district had representation, et cetera. So I did come across Grace.

Chall: She was with George Brown?

Schechter: Yes. That's where she was active. We all would meet at least once a month on a congressional level, but in terms of ongoing, day-to-day activity, hers was the Forty-fifth Assembly District.

Chall: What is she doing now?

Schechter: Grave Montañez Davis is Deputy Mayor of the City of Los Angeles.

Chall: What about Vilma Martinez, the director of the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund. Do you know her?

Schechter: Only through my interest in education. Isn't she in San Francisco now?

Chall: I think so.

Schechter: She, I would say, came on the scene in the sixties.

Chall: That could be.

Schechter: Late sixties; prominent in the seventies; so that she's come into her own just recently. She's an attorney also, I believe.

Chall: That's right.

Schechter: Her coming onto the scene has, I would say, flowered in the seventies. So you're talking about a much later stage.

Chall: Ernesto Galarza. Have you ever worked with him or known him?

Schechter: Yes. He was part of our CSO group. We all worked with him; we all knew him. He's an old-timer. Delightful person, one who could really have made a lot of money. He came on the scene with all the credentials that you can want in terms of going into the academic life. He could have done anything. He could have written. And he dedicated his life to the Mexican-American community--did not really move out of the district and earn a lot of money. He just dedicated his life to the cause, La Causa.

Chall: I see, so he's really--

Schechter: Yes, he's really an amazing man. If you were to place someone on a pedestal, he really would be the one. Because Roybal was tremendous, but he received a lot of recognition, achievement, and you know that he was able to make a very comfortable living.

Schechter: I'm saying that Ernesto didn't. He really never, never achieved any measure of affluence and, therefore, believed in what he was doing and at no time.... I'm not saying that anyone else profited because I don't want to use that word or in any way create that kind of impression. But he is one who just remained with the people. At no time interested to make a dime and literally didn't. And if he had it, he would plough it right back in again.

Chall: That means he sacrificed--

Schechter: He's like a Benito Juarez type.

Chall: Your Spanish is so good; I can't spell it.

Schechter: [spells out name]

Chall: And Cesar Chavez. Where does he fall in this?

Schechter: He originally also was a CSO member. The beginning of his Farm Workers movement was also Community Service Organization. He was responsible for starting the Community Service Organization in his area, which eventually evolved into organizing the agricultural workers. It all meshes in with Fred Ross's moving into the area.

He would hit different communities and stay there until he would get some semblance of an organization going. So the background of the agricultural workers, once again, goes back to the Community Service Organization and, once again, you can see the strong impact of the Saul Alinsky background in terms of a grass roots movement. Those who would be very difficult to reach and one never thought of reaching--I'm talking about the organized communities--because they were so difficult to reach. So they reached those who absolutely were helpless, had no knowledge of organizational structure, nothing. I think that CSO did a tremendous job in that area in terms of developing and bringing along a Cesar Chavez.

Once again, Cesar comes on the scene in the sixties, at the most, late fifties. So you're not talking forties and fifties with him; you're really talking late fifties, sixties, and seventies. I think he really reached his apex in the sixties. I really don't see that they have.... They've lost a lot of ground in the seventies. Once again, there's that old axiomatic saying about a good organizer is not really a good administrator. I think this is his failing. Instead of shifting gears and saying, "Okay, I will compartmentalize and I will continue along

Schechter: these lines where I know I'm effective," he tried to do the other and really didn't have the background. This, I think, cost him a lot in terms of the strides he'd made; the goals he had reached, and then just lost.

I think that he could have, early on, achieved his goal which he finally did. He could have worked out something with the Teamsters; it was one of the things I kept saying, even though I was not up there to tell it to him. I thought at some point someone would. Apparently the biggest thorn in his side were the Teamsters from the very beginning. This was something that could have been foreseen in terms of the cannery workers versus the field workers. What finally did evolve was the Teamsters did end up with the cannery workers, but he could have made that same accommodation as we did in the ILG.

A shipping clerk was going to belong to them, come hell or high water, because they already had the truck drivers. So we just had this happy marriage where, at least, when we declared a strike, we weren't fighting each other. We could present a united front and that's all....

He could have used them instead of dissipating his strength fighting them, when the common enemy was the grower. I think this is where he dissipated his strength, and it's really unfortunate. In other words, he didn't have to go downhill in order to recognize that there was something that could be done to save the movement, because he's now going to have to start building.

Already, I think he's been losing some elections, too. You can't disappoint people and not have it reflect on you; they no longer trust you. If you don't keep the momentum going--he lost his momentum with the struggle with the Teamsters.

Chall: Do you think that the farm labor laws now that are in effect, will ultimately work so that the farm laborers are going to be benefited? It's been a long struggle.

Schechter: It has been a long struggle and they really haven't ironed it out in terms of the commission that was set up by Brown, because Brown apparently goofed on his appointments, initially, where the growers thought it was weighted in terms of the agricultural workers. Instead of having a balanced representation, the panel went overboard, so it's just been one series of setbacks after another. I think that now, perhaps they can start to build. But they had unfortunate setbacks that could have been avoided.

Chall: Well, they didn't have experienced hands then.

Schechter: They grew awfully fast. Yes, I agree with you that they did not have experienced hands. They needed someone to administer the program and did not have the people.

Chall: Are there any other people whose names stand out in your mind as important leaders in the Mexican-American community?

Schechter: I think Henrietta Villaescusa was one that worked very hard and very effectively. She's now in Washington, D.C.--but she was one of the original members in Community Service Organization. She's a registered nurse, and so was in the public health section, and is now in that field in Washington, D.C.--apparently a very important position, Community Participation Specialist at HEW.

Chall: Appointed by Carter?

Schechter: Previous to that, under Johnson. And she has remained--a woman who never married--and so was able to be flexible in terms of accepting appointments, and so was able to go on.

This gal from Arizona--she's now an attorney also--
Graciela Olivarez. Graciela Olivarez is now Director of Community Services Administration (formerly Office of Economic Opportunity).

Chall: Any other women you consider important?

Schechter: No.

Chall: Any men?

Schechter: Even your past governor from Arizona [Raul Castro] who just became an ambassador, to Argentina, for many years worked in the state of Arizona. We would have regional meetings and so we had a chance to meet with some of these people. Just in the recent past, he was appointed ambassador by Carter. As governor of Arizona he was very effective, and really did a tremendous job in that state. He worked with this same woman that we've been talking about.

Texas has had a tremendous amount of leaders in El Paso, San Antonio, Houston. The University of Texas at Austin has always worked very closely with the Catholic Church--has always worked very hard to develop Mexican-American leadership in Texas.

We found that in many instances they were way ahead of us in terms of number of professional persons. Lawyers, doctors, et cetera. For example, San Antonio still leads the nation in tuberculosis. Like the blacks have problems with sickle cell, Mexican-Americans have it with tuberculosis--the incidence. So

Schechter: that San Antonio, Texas has the highest incidence of TB nationally. I know that because this is one of the ongoing problems with Mexican-Americans. I remember going through school, every semester, because I was always very thin, every semester they'd give me the test, and I never developed the problem; I just was always thin. But this has always been one of the problems.

Chall: Part of the living conditions.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: If you think of any others when you're editing, drop them in and explain who they are.

Schechter: Yes. You see, I'm trying to stay away from the seventies. It's so obvious who the leaders are that I'm deliberately not saying Alatorre on down the line because these are now current. I think you're more interested in those--

Chall: In the past--if there were any that had stature, and there must have always been a few.

Schechter: Yes, Consuelo De Bonzo, who owned La Golondrina restaurant on Olivera Street--she just passed away about two years ago. She was a tremendous person in terms of being active; served on commissions, appointed by the mayor, under Bowron, under Yorty. By the time Bradley came along, by this time she was too old. But here's a gal who was a real power. She could reach anyone in the state.

California Governors and the Mexican-American Community

Chall: What about the governors and their response to the Mexican-American community. You started working so long ago that you would have had some understanding of their responses: Warren, Knight, Pat Brown, Reagan, and then Jerry Brown.

Schechter: I think until Brown came on the scene, there had never been any meaningful appointments of Mexican-Americans that I can think of.

Chall: That's Pat Brown.

Schechter: Pat Brown. So until Pat Brown came on the scene, there really --well, prior to that, since I came on, got active in politics, we always had Republicans, because we had Warren; then we had Knight. It wasn't until Pat Brown.

Schechter: I remember Susie Clifton would always refer to our slate as the GD Slate--Glorious Defeat. It didn't mean that we weren't working hard. You had then the cross-filing. With the reservoir of money that the Republicans always had, they always won the elections in the primary. I'm sure Susie wasn't being cynical; she was just being a realist.

Chall: That's right. I have a list of the Mexican-American appointees of Governor Edmund Brown [Sr.]. There are quite a number of them, so what I'm interested in is who helped him pick these people? These are for all kinds of--you know, little and big boards and commissions, industrial welfare commissions, state board of trustees of the mental hospitals, judges. His kitchen cabinet.

Chall: I see. Was there anyone in the Mexican community in this kitchen cabinet? Were people like you, on the outside, ever consulted? Were CSO people ever consulted, do you know?

Schechter: Not to my knowledge. And I think that's no reflection on Pat Brown. He was just so busy; there's just so much time he can devote to it. You know, the wheel that squeaks the loudest. And we have never been known for being the wheel that squeaks. That's been one of our biggest problems is that we've never squeaked.

Even so, we finally reached a point where we began to get meaningful appointments. Under Reagan, those Mexican-Americans who did get appointed were Republicans. So they weren't really people that we worked with. Even though we would run into each other, perhaps at a dinner honoring someone who was Mexican-American--the Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce--we were not really on an ongoing, working-together basis.

Even Reagan made an attempt to give us some appointments, where before, Goodie Knight had not, or Warren had not. So really, we're talking into the fifties before some recognition was being given.

Chall: Now, of course, the Mexican community--the fact that it exists is well enough known.

Schechter: Oh yes, it is.

Chall: Jerry Brown has made a few appointments. Some of them are under fire, but at least he's made them.

Schechter: Dr. [Francisco] Bravo--he serves on the board of Youth Opportunities Foundation--he's a very successful doctor. He, for example, is the one who personally paid for Nava's education. So you're talking way back. And he always did this, and has always done it.

Chall: Julian Nava?

Schechter: Julian Nava. Through the years, as I have worked with him, he has always given real help. Like this last board meeting that we had. You name the roster of people that you're going to help. There are always those late applications which come in under the wire. By this time you have already allocated the money, or you only have only so much money to allocate. Dr. Bravo is interested in the medical field especially, although he will help others so wherever we find a worthy candidate, and we no longer have any money, he will personally fund that scholarship, or grant, or whatever.

Chall: That would be for somebody who wants to be a nurse, or going to medical or dental school?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Somebody who's that far along in his goal?

Schechter: Yes. He has various other interests over and above his medical practice, so that he has become a very, very wealthy man. You can always call on him. He's not a Johnny-come-lately. I would say he's now close to seventy. So he has been doing this for a very long time. When I came on the scene, he was doing it.

Chall: Where did he get his medical training?

Schechter: I don't know, and I've known him a long time and I see him like once a month. He has his offices on Soto, in the East L.A. area.

Chall: I have a note here. [reading] "Brown," it says--that's Pat Brown--"never took a consistent view on the question of Braceros. At a critical juncture of the Delgado grape-workers' strike, he was inaccessible. He may have, therefore, lost the Mexican-Americans as well as a number of other minority groups." Do you think that's so?

Schechter: Maybe it was, in that area. But I think, statewide, he was able to maintain his popularity. Because he really was a good-hearted man. I think to a large extent, some people used him. I don't want to use any names; I don't want to unnecessarily hurt people's feelings, but I think some of the people around him used him for their own selfish reasons. You know, when you're

Schechter: governor, it's like being president, you can't take care of every chore; you can't attend every meeting; you can't know everything that's going on; you have to rely on the people around you. And I think what happened there, in some instances, that he just was --he was very trusting. That's as nicely as I can put it.

Chall: You're saying that in terms of the Mexican-American community. What you know that might have occurred?

Schechter: Yes. Had it ever come to his attention, believe me, he would have done it because he was genuinely a good hearted man, he really was--is, I should say; I'm just speaking past tense because he's no longer the governor. But I think he's a well meaning man who perhaps would have been more effective had he had someone counseling him, who had a little more sensitivity. It was unfortunate that he didn't, but I don't think he was aware of it. That's really the crux of the whole thing. See, the word "Republican" in the Mexican-American community has a bad connotation.

Chall: I see. Are there any?

Schechter: Yes, and so you get the wrinkling of a nose if you even say the word "Republican" in Spanish--Republicano. It reminds them of the government in Mexico and the government troops who fought against the Revolution.

And in terms of Pat Brown's programs, it was under his administration that you got FEPC, housing--you name it. It was all under his administration. True, the one who was carrying the ball in the legislature was Jesse Unruh. He did a very magnificent job for him, even though they had their falling out, but programatically, everything got done. So I think, in the total picture, his was a very successful administration. And you can't have the whole pie. So I'll take what I got, because by and large, I think it was good.

Chall: Rather than what you had before.

Schechter: Of course. Which was nothing.

IV ACTIVIST IN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY, 1948-1978

Women in the Democratic Party

Chall: I'll let you look at this. This is the list of the Democratic party leaders, and we'll probably be referring to that, so you might as well have it in front of you.

I wanted to talk about some aspects--not the whole history--of the Democratic State Central Committee, but a few things I thought might be highlights from the standpoint, at least of my project, here.

In terms of women, the only time that I know of when women attempted to become leaders of the party, state chairman would be in 1954, when Liz Snyder attempted it; in 1966, when Carmen Warschaw ran; and in 1973, when Patricia Nisbet tried it. I think she withdrew before it even came to a vote.

Schechter: Probably counted heads.

Chall: Probably so, yes. I don't know anything about that in terms of a vote. But you were on the scene when Liz Snyder became chairman and when Carmen Warschaw tried. I just wonder if you can give me some background on these two campaigns.

Schechter: Both were very, very bitter campaigns.

Chall: Do you think that those campaigns were anti-woman or was it anti-the individual, anti-Snyder as a person, anti-Warschaw as a person, or a combination of both?

Schechter: I have always had the feeling that, as is now happening with the ERA in the different states where we still haven't gotten a majority, that there's a deeply ingrained anti-woman feeling among men. Some of them well meaning, because I have to put it in that context when I'm talking about the Democratic party, where

Schechter: I think it's subliminal. They're not even aware of it. And I think they used everything they could to obstruct women leadership. Using other guises. But I think the underlying thread was really one of we don't want a woman. I really have that feeling. Because they always want to relegate women into a secondary position.

So even this last campaign, where we retained the women's division. The gal who got elected was this young gal, very dynamic, really articulate, good background. [Alice Travis] When I say she's young, she's under forty--like thirty, thirty-two, something like this. The last time I ran into her, she was very discouraged because she really has been shunted into a secondary position. I tried to tell her when she was running for office against Stella [Epstein]. She also ran as an incumbent and lost.

Chall: That was for chairperson of the women's division? Are we talking about that?

Schechter: Yes. And I tried to tell her, when she was really knocking Stella: I said you can't just criticize. You have to be in the driver's seat to understand how they won't give you the chance to do an effective job. So, they're doing it to her and this other gal in San Diego. [Paula Siegal] I just got a letter from them about a meeting or something.

Chall: I am not up with the latest activities of the party--I've just gone to about 1973, studying the party. But I'm interested to know what's become of the women's division. There's been an attempt recently, I thought, to sort of give it a special place so that the women are not under the direction of the chairman of the party. But there has been no change?

The Campaign to Elect Elizabeth Snyder Party Chairman, 1954

Schechter: It still is what it has been. Liz Snyder, of course, was a real pioneer. Did she tell you that it was William Munnell who was the candidate running against her in that campaign--who was put up?

Chall: Yes.

Schechter: Well, I was his appointment to the state central committee and I had to tell him I couldn't support him. All the strong friendships that I had developed, many of them came apart at the seams during that campaign.

Schechter: You had Alan Cranston opposing her. You had Glenn Anderson opposing her. All these liberal Democrats that you'd think would have closed ranks. The fact that she's a woman is irrelevant. Would she be an effective chairman was what was meaningful.

And Munnell, as a legislator, couldn't devote the time that someone in Liz's position or someone else could have. We've always been opposed to legislators being chairman because they, at some point, have to run for office, and that becomes the over-riding consideration. Therefore, at a time when you need leadership, it's not there because the legislator, of course, has to run for office.

All it was was another stumbling block, an embarrassing one, because they had someone who was from the same congressional district. With Liz, of course, they used her husband. They used part of her background, too, against her, and blown completely out of proportion. Friendships just dissipated.

Chall: Is that right?

Schechter: It was the first time the California congressional delegation came out to a state central committee convention and they came en masse, led by Sam Yorty. Sam Yorty, in those days was, believe it or not, a liberal. He was the congressman from the Fifteenth Congressional District, which was Helen Gahagan Douglas's old congressional district. He reflected the sentiments of that district.

In her campaign, we programmed very well. We had to find out what the agenda was. This was part of the crux of does-Liz-win, doesn't-Liz-win, because they were really working as hard as we were. So we had to find out what their agenda was. ## Also, we knew that if you hold the election late in the day your support is dissipated because they have to get back home.

Chall: That's right.

Schechter: So we had to find out when the elections, or the nominations, were going to be held. We knew--just judging from past history, how you win and how you lose elections--it was to their advantage to push it as late as possible because their people were going to stay. Ours we would lose because number one, the California congressional delegation had to leave, which meant that we'd lost all those people. And we knew we were going to need every vote. So, over and above trying to corral as many votes as we could and trying to win the campaign, part of the over-riding consideration was finding out what they had in mind.



1950. Seated left, Esther Murray, Congressman Chet Holifield, Helen Gahagan Douglas; seated from right, James Roosevelt, Glenn Anderson, U.S. Senator Dennis Chavez (N.M.). Standing behind James Roosevelt, John Despol (C.I.O.); standing behind Helen Douglas, Hope Schechter.

Trudy Owens, Margaret Sweeney, Hope Schechter, and actress Diana Lynn preparing for a Democratic Women's Forum Fashion Show, October 1965.



1965/1966. California Governor Ronald Reagan speaking to a banquet of the Youth Opportunities Board. Left to right: Los Angeles Municipal Court Judge Benjamin U. Vega, Hope Schechter, Dr. Francisco Bravo, Governor Reagan, Felix Castro, Superior Court Judges Philip Newman and Leopoldo Sanchez.

Schechter: I was assigned to find out about the agenda. We knew that Pat [Brown] had it, and I knew where he was staying. He was staying at a very fancy motel. He was spotted on his patio. So I got into my swimsuit and swam across and waved my hand at him, and told him I knew he was going to be a speaker and would he read his speech to me. He read me his speech and one thing led to another, and I said, "Well, what's the agenda going to be?"

By this time, he was not aware that I was from the spy camp and he showed me the agenda. This is how we found out that they had pushed it for late in the day which is exactly what we knew that they were going to do. So the next morning, when the convention was called to order, Sam Yorty hit that mike and moved for the elections to be held immediately. He just caught them by storm. Because the California delegation had to leave and since they all took the time out from a busy schedule and Congress to fly out, they wanted to have the opportunity to vote and didn't want to be deprived of that right. He really just carried the whole thing and he's a very dynamic kind of a person. Notwithstanding negative feelings, you really have to see it in action and put it in its proper time and place to be able to understand that, at this point, it was not the Sam Yorty that you now sneer at.

But at that time and that place--

Chall: He was a hero.

Schechter: Yes, he was a hero. And it carried the day. This is how Liz won. Late in the day, she would not have done it.

Chall: You had all your votes then.

Schechter: We had all our votes then and we needed every vote, and we won it.

Aftermath of a Tough and Bitter Campaign

Chall: Now, when you say that friendships were severed, that ties were severed--

Schechter: I would say that that was sort of the beginning of it--that battle was a very, very, bitter, bitter battle.

Chall: Didn't they heal? For example, did Munnell appoint you again?

Schechter: Yes, he did. He appointed me. It wasn't that he wasn't disenchanted with what I had done, and I can understand. I'm sure that he was quite bitter. He needed me. I was too well known in the area and even though it was a solidly Democratic--he wanted to present a united front. I not only was active in the labor movement--he needed labor endorsement--he needed Mexican-American support. The district has always been predominantly Mexican-American. Munnell is an Anglo. He probably would have won reelection against a Mexican, but why have a fight? Why split the district? Why spend lots of money in a primary race? My strong ties to labor and my activism were other factors for him to consider. He would rather have me as a friend than as an enemy.

Chall: So he did need you.

Schechter: Yes. I really was as gentle with him as possible in terms of what I understood. Well, Chet [Holifield] had the same problem, where Munnell had been his protege, he had to tell him, "I cannot support you because I gave my commitment to Liz," which we had done. This can happen with the best of friends where you make a commitment in advance, and someone else comes along who's just as much a dear friend but you've made an earlier commitment.

Now, that doesn't lessen their disappointment and it doesn't lessen the fact that they're hurt, but you have to honor earlier commitments. I know this is the tack I took with Munnell and I was being very candid; I was being very honest. That my commitment had been to Liz. The fact that he had appointed me was irrelevant. My commitment had to hold. I wasn't going to renege and say, "Withdraw your appointment of me to the state central committee," because that would be biting off my nose. No, I wasn't going to afford him the opportunity of doing it to me, anyway. [chuckles]

Chall: Does it generally happen that if an appointment is made that in a crucial election, as they have them from time to time, one is expected to do what the appointer asks of him or her?

Schechter: Yes, and it hasn't changed.

Chall: And they do ask you to vote one way or another if it's crucial and critical?

Schechter: Yes. And you can, once again, use your own judgement. I must say it's not structured like in the Republican party, where this is the way you vote, period. We're more fluid. In that sense, I think that even though they voice their preferences, you are still given that greater flexibility.

Chall: And since so many of the votes are open, they know how you vote.

Schechter: No, it's by secret ballots.

Chall: It is?

Schechter: Yes, it's a secret ballot.

Chall: I see, so they really don't know?

Schechter: No. There's no way they can know. That one vote is not the crucial one. It's one of getting out and lobbying for your candidate, so that one vote--forget it. You have to be open. If you're going to oppose whoever appointed you, you have to do it openly if you want to be effective. Otherwise, who's going to know you did it? If the other guy--the one you really wanted to win, ends up winning, you're still going to be in bad graces.

I've always taken the position that no matter who appoints me, if I feel strongly enough, I will explain why I am doing it, but I'll stick by my guns. The other way, if I have no strong feelings one way or the other, we're a team, okay, big deal--I have no particular loyalties; it doesn't matter.

For example, this last election, I really didn't care about either candidate, Burt Coffey versus this attorney [Fred Furth] from San Francisco.

Chall: Yes.

Schechter: Howard [Berman] was for Burt Coffey. He was a northern candidate; it was going to go to the north; it didn't make any difference to me which one won. I knew them both. So we worked for Burt Coffey. He's now the new chairman.

Chall: Do you think that the average woman appointed is less likely to take a position against the person who appointed her than the average man, or is there no difference sexually? I mean, it doesn't matter. The woman is no more nor less willing to go out on a limb than a man?

Schechter: When you get appointed, by this time, it's like a personal friend. You've worked in the campaign together. So it isn't just like they opportunistically select someone and appoint them. It's someone who's been out on the hustings for them and helped them raise money, et cetera. So that by the time you get an appointment, you've evolved personal ties. So the fact that you buck them on something--it has to be a very crucial thing where you have to weigh it.

Schechter: It's not because you want to oppose the person who's appointing you. I think you always have that freedom. It's just that it has to be very crucial. There has to be something else behind it for you to take that kind of position. I think that more or less carries through. I don't think it has anything to do with whether it's a man or a woman. I think that it's one of personal choice at all times.

You always get the weak-kneed person, whether woman or man, so I don't think either one has a claim to it.

Treatment as Chairman

Chall: Munnell reappointed you because he needed you. Were there other problems that followed this election? I mean, was the party split? Did a split ensue that was difficult to heal, over a number of years, or did Liz Snyder manage to heal the breach?

Schechter: I don't think they ever stopped fighting. She had a financial problem all the way through, and I don't think--if it weren't for the unions, who really backed her--that she would have had the money to sustain the headquarters, et cetera.

I remember George O'Brien, who's now dead--he was with the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers]. He was one of her very staunch supporters. He really worked hard to raise money for her. But they never let up. At state central committee meetings, they went out of their way to try to embarrass and humiliate her.

She happens to be a person with a tremendous background, educationally, et cetera, a very articulate kind of a person, very gentle. She was able to roll with the punches. They threw them at her. I think a more emotional type of person would have blown up and lost her cool. I never saw her do so regardless of the provocation.

George Miller was an absolute bastard. You've never supposed to speak ill of the dead, but he never let up. He was like a bull dog, and he would sit there uptight. You know, once someone wins an election, you sit back and you relax. Okay, I've got to live with it for two years, or whatever it is. They never let up in terms of making her life as difficult as possible.

Chall: Have you ever seen that done with another chairman?

Schechter: It's always been men. No, I have not seen it to that extent--never. I mean they'll close ranks--the clubby type thing--so you lost. But they wouldn't in this instance.

The Campaign to Elect Carmen Warschaw Party Chairman, 1966

Schechter: I think this carried over into Carmen's campaign.

Chall: That was a good decade or more later.

Schechter: Yes, and it was the same. Well, different faces; there you had the additional--now you had the Gene Wyman factor.

I was on the executive committee of the state central committee at the time--I forget who was chairman. There was an opening coming up in the state central committee. Wyman wanted to be state chairman. He wasn't even a member of the state central committee.

The initial fight was getting him on the state central committee. You had to get someone to resign and then you had to vote on them. I remember the meeting was in San Francisco. I didn't go to all the meetings statewide because it cost me money. But to make sure that he got on the state central committee, the executive committee had to vote on it.

I purposely went to that meeting because we were all very good friends. I went to that meeting to make sure that Gene got on the state central committee.

Carmen Warschaw told Gene, "I'll support you, Gene, if you will support me." Later when Carmen reminded Gene of his pledge to support her he said, "Next time, get it in writing."

I was part of the group that went up to--the meeting was in San Francisco, I believe. And we lobbied the other state central committee members to make sure that Gene got on the state central committee, because of the opening, and then elect him chairman.

Chall: Was that all done in one meeting? Putting him on and then electing him chairman?

Schechter: It strikes me as having been done beforehand, because he had to be a member in order to be elected chairman and he was elected at the executive committee meeting.

Chall: Carmen Warschaw thinks that William Munnell resigned as vice-chairman, southern division, or chairman south, because he was appointed judge.

Schechter: Yes, by Pat Brown.

Chall: Now, I haven't caught any of that before, so he must have resigned in mid-term.

Schechter: And Gene wasn't even a member of the state central committee.

Chall: That's right. So he had to be appointed?

Schechter: You had to get someone to resign in order to make the opening for him, because you only have so many slots; and half are women and half are men. So we had to get someone to resign and then elect him. The executive committee had the power to elect or to appoint someone to the state central committee and then elect them chairman. This is the way I remember it. I remember he came on in midstream.

We were all very good friends. When I got married, Liz gave me a shower. I still have Roz Wyman's present. Then when Roz was getting married, I remember I took her shopping for her trousseau because I was working for the union and I could go to all the wholesale houses that made expensive garments. Gene went with us, and all three of us were going from shop to shop as she was shopping for her trousseau. The camaraderie was there. We had all been through all these campaigns together. It was like a family. I feel as close to many of these political people as I do to my family. If anything happens to them, it's like it happens to my family.

It was really traumatic. It was one thing to be fighting the George Millers, who were up north and distant relatives, and we never really liked them anyway, but when it hit this close to home....it was disastrous. I don't know if Carmen told you when she ran, they were looking for a candidate, and the one who found Charles Warren to oppose her was Roybal.

Chall: No, she didn't. We had so much to cover, she probably forgot to mention it. I'm glad to get this on the record. Did Roybal have a falling out with Carmen Warschaw?

Schechter: Yes. He was with the opposition. The senator from East L.A., a Mexican-American, state senator--I'm blocking out his name-- [AlexGarcia]--was Roybal's AA then. Between the two of them, they're the ones who found Warren, who was an assemblyman in their

- Schechter: congressional district. So they were just looking for a body, and that's really all he ever was and all he ever did while in office. He never did anything. He was just the stumbling block. He was just the one they were going to use, and they used him very effectively, to stop her election.
- Chall: This, you think, was largely because she was a woman and secondly, because she had a falling out with Gene Wyman that meant a falling out with a lot of people in the party, and they did not want her to have this position?
- Schechter: Now, I'm doing two things; I'm confusing two elections. The state chairmanship, that's right. Then she also had the problem with the national committee spot. I was right in the middle of all these fights, and it's hard for me to recall each one after awhile, unless someone reminds me of the specifics.
- Chall: I can tell you about the specifics. In 1964 she had expected to be national committeewoman, and Wyman became national committeeman. So there was that election.
- Schechter: And we had all fought for Liz, and Liz sided with Gene.
- Chall: Yes.
- Schechter: So that for many years, Liz and I were like almost not on speaking terms, because I called her up and tried to get her to support Carmen and she wouldn't. She had already committed her support to Wyman. And she was aware of what had gone on before. This is what I found unforgiveable--for someone who knew the background. It wasn't like I was approaching someone who had not been in the middle of that prior battle of getting him on and what the understanding had been. She was fully cognizant of it. And yet turned. I've never been able to understand how or why, other than--
- Chall: She is a very close friend of the Wymans, of course.
- Schechter: We were all good friends. I guess you just had to make a choice and she made her choice, and that's about as blunt as I can be about it. We have now gone back to our old relationship. How long can you be angry? [chuckles]
- Chall: Yes, and some people have apparently been very angry about this. This has been a split that has lasted a long while. Particularly it's difficult when it's close friends.

Schechter: Yes, because I remember coming back from Carmen's losing campaign for state chairman, walking out of the hall and saying f--- Pat Brown. I sat on my hands, and he lost. I'm not saying that he lost because I sat on my hands, but I think it was pervasive. Those of us who supported Carmen felt that Pat Brown double-crossed us--he really humiliated her. He was supposed to come out and endorse her and she had to go running after him on stage! and pull him back and remind him of his commitment. And he ended up saying, "I like them both" or some such willy-nilly thing.

We walked out of that hall bitter. In the past we had worked so hard, and this time we just coasted through the campaign. We just decided he can make his commitments and we'll make ours too.

Chall: Were there many of you who had that feeling after that loss of Carmen Warschaw's?

Schechter: That's the campaign he lost in 1966 against Reagan. I know at the time, those of us who supported him were all saying the same thing.

Chall: So it wasn't just Warschaw who was angry and bitter--it was a whole group of her supporters--a large number?

Schechter: Yes, because we had been in it from the very beginning. We knew what had really happened. It wasn't being sore losers. We knew what the understanding had been and we just felt that we had been had; that they'd gotten everything they could out of us, and then when we wanted something, we didn't get it. When the commitment had already been made. We were disillusioned; we we just picked up our marbles and went home.

Chall: There are many people who, over the years, haven't liked Carmen Warschaw because, for one thing, her personality--they claim.

Schechter: Yes. Unlike Liz, not that it did Liz much good other than the fact that she got elected, Carmen is much more blunt. She's a tell-it-like-it-is person--can be as articulate as everyone else, but on the political scene, she's very honest, very candid, very frank. She'll pull no punches. Many people don't like that. They like diplomacy a little bit more, forgetting that the stakes are high. And you don't have time to be nice, sometimes.

On a personal level, she is as sweet a person as you ever want--generous. Unfortunately, I think they almost made her very suspicious where you had the election of Wyman, the buildup to a double-cross, which is what it amounted to, so that she couldn't be nice after awhile. You can only get kicked so much.

Schechter: They wanted her to continue being nice even though they were kicking her at every opportunity, and by this time, she's ready to say "Go jump."

I think this is really what triggered the whole thing. So she just reached the point where she couldn't be nice to them anymore.

Chall: I see. So it was a long period of general hostility.

Schechter: Yes. You can't keep kicking someone and expect them to continue being nice to you all the time. At some point, they're going to bite back, and she did.

Chall: Her slogan she says is, "Don't get mad, get even." That shows that anyone can play a rough game. I don't know how many people in politics play that kind of game; I don't know whether men do it more or better than women, but....

Schechter: Well, especially when you know you have the commitments. And she had them. They all just disappeared.

Chall: Previous to that, there had been the Salinger-Cranston election. Of course, many southern Californians sided with Salinger, so it wasn't just Carmen Warschaw who was on the Salinger side, but that left a residue of bitterness, too, probably. Cranston, I understand, opposed her in 1966. That may have been part of it.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: So she had a lot going against her besides her sex.

Schechter: Yes. It's like stumbling blocks. Then Cranston, being a northerner, was never helpful. He opposed Liz for state chairman. You have to keep in mind, unless you're active in politics, that even though it may be our year to run and select our southern chairman, or it's our turn to have the chairmanship, the north always wants to call the shots for the south.

The south has always been the more democratic in the sense that it's your ball park this time; you play it the way you want. They never have. They have always interfered.

Chall: Still they do? Or did then?

Schechter: Still do. Well, the last few campaigns, I couldn't care. I lost total interest in terms of being that involved, even though I'm still on the state central committee. I guess because there's

Schechter: not another woman running. Another man, you know. Manatt has been a great guy, so we've always gotten along well.

But it's always been the north versus the south.

Chall: Who had appointed you and had that person expected you to vote for Warren?

Schechter: By that time, I was already living in the valley [San Fernando]. This used to be heavily Republican; it's now heavily Democratic. We went through, in this area, many, many lean years where we would have our glorious defeats. But because we were in charge of the campaigns, be it assembly or senate, we would make sure our candidate won. So then, we got appointed, because we could get them through the primary--our problem was the general. We never had a problem electing our candidate in the primary. This meant that I got appointed, whether it was a senatorial candidate or whether it was the assembly candidate. So I always stayed on the state central committee. It wasn't until Howard came on the scene that we knocked off the incumbent.

Chall: That's Howard Berman?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: I see. You didn't owe anybody any favors then?

Schechter: No.

Chall: And did you help round up votes for Carmen Warschaw, or had she come in with just about all she was going to get?

Schechter: Not only did we come in with the votes we knew we had; we had a hard time keeping them. It was a constant like sand--it was just shifting. You thought you had them, then you'd lose them, you thought you had them committed.... [Lionel] Van Deerlin, she thought she had initially, and that is one that slipped away. He ended up not supporting her.

Chall: You had no way of knowing that for sure, though, because that was a closed ballot.

Schechter: I remember an important phone call to Washington, because he didn't even come to the convention. But his people were not backing us, and we found out he was calling the shots from Washington. So he was not for her.

Did she tell you about the victory cocktail party that had already been planned for Charles Warren?

Chall: Yes.

Schechter: You know, all these little things--after you've worked so hard--we all felt a personal betrayal. I'm sure she felt it worse than we did, but I can't imagine how much worse. Because there were so many unnecessary unkind things that were done.

Accepting Women in the Democratic Party

Chall: How did she, or any of the other women you've known, who've wanted something in public office and couldn't get it, show hurt? I guess we have to compare it to, let's say, to the election of Charles Manatt over George Brown in 1970, or any of the times when there was a strong campaign and a man lost to another man. Do they take their hurts any differently than the way Carmen Warschaw or the other women who have lost, took theirs? Is there a difference?

I have a copy of something here from the People's World [January 31, 1971] about the challenge George Brown made to the Chicanos, or they challenged him and he became very angry. That was his campaign of 1971 for state chairman, and he lost his temper. You may remember that. He had embittered a group of Chicanos.

Schechter: Especially since he came from Monterey Park here in East Los Angeles, which was heavily Mexican-American. It wasn't as though, let's say it were someone from the west side, or a non-Mexican. But here was someone who--while not a Mexican-American--had been mayor of the town, been city councilman in the area, had a strong tie with Mexican-Americans. So, for him to have angered them and to have blown his cool was not very smart. ##

We have people in our party that I don't like, ideologically and personally. I'm too much of a party person to criticize my fellow Democrat. I take the position that the Republicans have their bastards and we have ours, and I'll take mine any day. That's putting it rather bluntly, but I don't know how else to put it in more polite terms. By the time I get to proof this, I'll think of something kinder to say rather than the way I just put it.

Chall: Well, no, I hope you're not going to make it all pretty. You have to be honest about your feelings, otherwise we don't have a real history here.

Chall: I was just making a few comparisons because as we look down this list of political party leaders, there weren't very many major battles. The few that I think I know in southern California are those which involve Liz Snyder, Carmen Warschaw once or twice, and George Brown. I was just interested to know whether there's any difference in the way the hurt shows; whether there's a sex difference. Whether Carmen Warschaw can be just as hurt as George Brown, and one doesn't have to say that women are more emotional about things like this than men.

Schechter: No, I don't think so.

Chall: Which it is claimed they are.

Schechter: I don't think so. However, it's one thing to lose without that bitterness. I think those three battles were very bitter ones. Some campaigns can be fought cleanly. I win or I lose. A pat on the back. It's like after a football game, or a tennis match, you walk over--

Chall: All sportsmanship.

Schechter: Yes. I would say these are the three outstanding bitter campaigns that I can remember. I think this was one of the reasons why some don't stand out, because they weren't bitter fights. You were just as happy with one or the other--whatever. But some had added dimensions to them, and I really think that part of Liz's problem and part of Carmen's problem was really the fact that they were women. It's a gut reaction.

It's like a black who's being discriminated against, or a minority group that's being discriminated against. You know it's there. Unless you are a woman, you don't know how you know, or unless you're a black, you don't know how you know, or another minority group, when they're zinging it to you, but you know. I think this is really what I'm saying.

Chall: You served on the executive committee for many years, didn't you?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Who appoints to the executive committee?

Schechter: Your own caucus. Your congressional caucus elects one man and one woman in order to balance it. (Now on the senate district level) That's how you are elected. Carmen is now on the executive committee.

Chall: Do you think women would be on the executive committee if it were not required that it be 50-50?

Schechter: I don't think so.

Chall: How are the women treated on the executive committee? Are they listened to? Are the meetings open or do the men often caucus by themselves without you?

Schechter: I think by the time you get to that level, most of the time, you're pretty articulate.

Chall: They'll pay attention.

Schechter: Yes, you're heard.

Did Liz tell you the time that I literally called [Richard] Graves a liar?

Chall: No.

Schechter: She'll probably remember it more. I vaguely recall that it was an executive committee meeting and Graves got up and said he had no candidate. I know it tied in with Liz. Inadvertently, I had overheard a conversation that he had had with someone else. One of these things where you're picking up your purse or whatever, and inadvertently you're listening to a conversation, and I heard him campaigning anti-Liz, or something. He was openly supporting Steve Zetterberg and then William Munnell up and down the state against Elizabeth Snyder.

The following week, there was this other function. Somehow it ties in with the dinner and an executive board meeting. I remember Del Smith, Liz's former partner, from then on always called me The Champ. I remember Graves was making this big speech about how he was neutral. Nobody got up to challenge him. I had already repeated it to some of the people about what had gone on in this private conversation that I inadvertently overheard, or found out about. Somehow, I found out about it. And I hit that floor and I called him a liar. Can you imagine, a gubernatorial candidate being called a liar?! And I called him a liar. Because he was.

But this is what I mean about the clubiness of men.

Chall: There is an undercurrent, then, of sex discrimination in the party? Is it any different from what it was in the union, or just the same?

Schechter: I would say just the same. [chuckles] You know, the superior versus the weak. As much as they try to make us feel that they accept us as equals--not quite.

Chall: Did you get the feeling that they thought that women were in politics because either they are expected to be, or are already somebody's mistress? They're only in there for one reason, or at least that's the only use they might have. Did you get that feeling in the party?

Schechter: No. I get the feeling that we're the drones. We're the ones that literally put the campaigns on, and they need us. I don't think it necessarily has the other--well, that is true and probably does happen. We're the workers. We're the ones that really do the day in and day out manning of headquarters, volunteers, et cetera, and put on the campaign.

The Role of the Women's Division

Chall: Now, the women's division. You said before that it sort of relegates the women to a secondary position, at least the leaders.

Schechter: But at least you have somebody watching the store, too. The other way, you'd have no one there to watch it.

Chall: To do the work, you mean?

Schechter: Not just that, but someone who's there on a day-in-and-day-out basis. Just to be able to have a voice, even though it may not be a powerful voice. I really feel, deep down, that we should not have a women's division. It's just like you have the feeling that everyone should be treated equally, but we're not treated equally. Well, the same way with women. We should be treated equally, but we're not. So until we are sure, we can't really let go of the women's division. We would like to, if we reach the ideal situation where we were treated equally, but as long as we're not really treated equally, we might as well hang on to this little bit, that we have.

Chall: So at least there's the chairman of something--At least it gives you some....

Schechter: Some recognition. Some woman the chance to develop into top leadership--have a title. And eventually use it as a stepping stone to the ideal time when we reach that utopia where we are--

Chall: [laughter] Where you might be a chairman of the party.

Schechter: Where you might be chairman of the party. At least we'd develop them to a point where they've had state-wide recognition, a chance to become well known, et cetera. So I don't want to let go of what we have.

Even like within the B'nai B'rith, they have the same ongoing battle. It's the women who are raising the money. The men are trying to absorb them. And the women are fighting it because they know that they're the ones, at the end of the year, who have the kitty, not the men.

The men talk big, and want the position and want the title, but they just want to use the women, and the women are hanging in there. Next Sunday, I'm going to an international convention that they're having here at the Bonaventure. Kaygey Kash who is a very good friend of mine, is international president of B'nai B'rith women.

Traditionally, my family gets together for every major holiday, and for the first time, since the day I was born, I am having my Easter celebration on Saturday because Kaygey Kash is a woman, and she's the international president. I'm going to a cocktail party in her honor and a dinner in her honor, and I'm not going to miss it. So, I had to call my whole family and tell them, hey, Easter Sunday's on Saturday! [laughter]

So I'm aware of what's happening there. If I sound slightly paranoid, it's because I touch so many bases, and can see that it's a repeated pattern. They're the superior race? I don't want to sound paranoid, but they are the superior--they think they are.

Chall: You mean the women are the superior race?

Schechter: We're the lackeys. The men are superior, they think.

Chall: The men are the superior race, quote-unquote. I see.

Schechter: We should know our place, according to men.

Chall: Then, women's divisions of many organizations are having a struggle about their roles in the structure?

Schechter: Ongoing, ongoing, ongoing battle.

Chall: It seems to be a conflict with the whole concept of equality that we are not able to do away the women's divisions of B'nai B'rith or of all the other organizations, and yet, at the same time, if it were to be done, as you point out, then maybe the women wouldn't have any place.

Schechter: Yes. B'nai B'rith women are resisting the pressure to merge with the men.

President, The Democratic Women's Forum, 1968-1971

Chall: You were the president of--

Schechter: --Democratic Women's Forum.

Chall: As I saw from some letterhead, it looks as if the women work up from vice-president to president. Is that the method?

Schechter: First the board of directors and then on up.

Chall: That's the way it's done?

Schechter: Yes, and I think I was the one that served the longest. I think I served three terms, 1968, 1969 and 1970.

Chall: As president?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: And how long is a term?

Schechter: One year.

Chall: So you served three years. I think I noticed that you were there rather a long time, but I wasn't sure whether that was one or two terms, or what.

Schechter: Three.

Chall: You were working at the time, or were you going to school?

Schechter: I was working, but I was then in business, which gave me a little more flexibility. Also it was during the time when Bruce was younger and I had live-in help, so that I could do it. I don't know how I did it. I think if I was president, I'd find the

Schechter: time. You always do. It's like you can't afford a house until you just can't stand an apartment. You buy a house. All of a sudden, you can afford the house. Or you can't afford the baby. But if you worry about what you can afford, you'd never have the baby; so you have the baby, and somehow you find that there's always food on the table and somehow they get to college. So I think that the same thing happens with being the president of an organization. It's going to take just so many hours and you have to put it in, and you do it. And somehow or other, something else has to suffer a little bit, but --you shunt it aside and it eventually gets done.

Chall: Well, this organization has quite a good sized core of officers and sponsors. I don't know whether they're all hard workers, but some of them would appear to be or to have been. You see their names from time to time.

Schechter: You know it's countywide. It's not just Los Angeles. It's the whole county of Los Angeles, and you draw on the leadership from the different areas. So you find that these women are the same women who are active in campaigns and the same women who are active in PTA. You will always find a woman who is active in politics--the only way she can be effective, is by being active within her community. Otherwise, where are the troops? So that by the time a campaign comes along, you've branched out into the community and that's the only way you can be effective.

If you see a woman on there, she's going to be a leader in her community. So by the time they get up to the executive board, you're talking about someone who had contributed a lot.

Chall: Was this an interesting group, then, to work with?

Schechter: Very much so, and reflected the entire economic spectrum in terms of working women, professionals, housewives, activists--across the board. Economically, et cetera.

Chall: Did it take a lot of your time? Was being president almost a full-time job for a group like this?

Schechter: I would say a lot of time. But they did have a lot of women that were really hard working and really helped. I think that's one way that you can measure someone's effectiveness, because you really can't do everything all by yourself. However, I have found, over the years, that if you really, really are at the helm, that ship's going to go whichever way you direct it. And you always have to be strong. If you're at the head, you've got to be strong at all times, and never let go.

Schechter: Even when you delegate authority, you follow through in terms of has it been done? You know, cross your t's, dot your i's.

Chall: You have to do all that. I noticed--it was not during your term --that the Democratic Women's Forum put on a workshop in practical politics. Four days in which they probably learned everything from making a speech to--I don't know what all that agenda was-- but the group put on functions of that kind. It took a great deal of effort.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: And planning and creativity. What did you see as your responsibility as president?

Schechter: Carrying on this kind of a program is two-pronged: One, you have to raise money. No matter what area you're in, everything eventually comes down to how much money do we have.

Chall: What did you do with the money in this organization?

Schechter: Primarily helped other women candidates. That's where the bulk of the money has always gone to. We endorse all women candidates. No men candidates. Just women.

Chall: Even in those days when hardly ever a woman ran?

Schechter: Yes. We had Helen Gahagan Douglas as an example. Who certainly was one of the outstanding women.

Chall: She was very early. There were others--Rudd Brown--there were other women who did run from time to time.

Schechter: Yes. Also you served as an arm in terms of the women's division, helping them. So that it all seemed to dovetail. Of course, ongoing education. Once a year they put on--we still put on-- these seminar-type all-day sessions. One's coming up soon. A tea is coming up.

Chall: You're still active?

Schechter: Yes. Not as much as I was. This was really very time consuming. But now all I have to do is attend a few board of directors meetings, and then their teas, et cetera. Still interest other women in joining, especially when you spot someone who's developing nicely. You want to get them onto the state central committee, a meaningful role, and as a delegate at the next convention. This is a good training ground for them.

- Chall: They have to be appointed by somebody, though.
- Schechter: Or they can run for county central committee. All they need is thirty signatures on the sponsors' list to qualify and be on the ballot. Teach them how to develop their own slates, and things like that.
- Chall: So it's leadership training for the party, then.
- Schechter: Yes.
- Chall: And a candidate's development.
- Schechter: Yes. It doesn't mean that we always support every single woman. I think there have been--mainly two women were not supported. I don't remember what the two instances were, offhand, but I do remember there were a couple of instances where we did not support women. And there were good reasons at the time.
- Chall: Did you support a man, or did you just not support the woman?
- Schechter: No, no, no. We could not support men. We just didn't give them money.
- Chall: Now that there are more women running, I suppose it becomes--
- Schechter: More important.
- Chall: In terms of figuring out which woman would be better--
- Schechter: --or allocating the funds, or of raising more money.
- Chall: Many women are running for office now, so that you might even have the problem of two women running for the same post.
- Schechter: Yes.
- Chall: So what would you do?
- Schechter: Have an open endorsement, I think.
- Chall: You wouldn't endorse one over the other, but you would try to support both of them. Is that the idea?
- Schechter: Either both of them, or open endorsement, and say, in the run-off, we'll support one.
- Chall: I see.

Schechter: Because most of the time in a situation like that, you would have a run-off. Or you could divide the money between the two. The board of directors decides and I think you just play it by ear each time. But the emphasis is on helping women.

Chall: This was really a forerunner of the National Women's Political Caucus.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: That's interesting. It was definitely a feminist organization. Did the women see themselves as that?

Schechter: I don't think so. I've always sort of felt I was liberated and I'm just glad that the rest of the women caught up with me.
[chuckles]

Chall: What special qualities do you think women bring to the legislature, or to other government posts? Do they see issues differently from men? Do they care about issues ignored by men? In short, do they make a difference in politics?

Schechter: Until women have full equal rights it does make a difference and it will make a difference. Take the matters of rape, credit for women, equal pay for women, jobs, and appointments to public office for women, et cetera. Until women became a political force, men ignored these issues and many more. Now they are aware of them and are compelled to vote on them because women legislators, and women administrators, and women in the electorate must be taken into account.

Undemocratic Treatment of an Opposing View: The Sam Yorty Campaign, 1969

Chall: While you were president, a very interesting problem developed. I think I know what was going on, but I'm not absolutely sure about it. Carmen Warschaw at an executive meeting of the state central committee in 1969, was going to speak, and she was booed when she began.

You, as president of the Democratic Women's Forum, sent out a letter, I presume with the approval of the board, bringing to the attention of members of the state central committee and others, how undemocratic it was to refuse to listen to a speaker at a meeting of the Democratic party.

Schechter: I've always categorized myself as a responsible Democrat. The Republican party has always had a problem, let's say, with the Birch Society. And it's a real problem and a crucial problem, and they've had their own battles.

We have always had the problem with the extreme Left. When the Independent Progressive Party went off the ballot, when they didn't qualify in terms of the number of votes that they were able to rally, we found that the Independent Progressive Party came right into our camp. So we have had an ongoing battle with them. And I find that while the Left espouse a particular point of view, they really are a reactionary group. Think as I think, do as I do, or I'm against you.

The reason I draw the distinction between a responsible Democrat and those kinds of Democrats is because I have always found them to be un-American, undemocratic, and they're very rigid. They're not flexible. The fact that your point of view is not one that they agree with, the fact that they disagree with you, they don't even want to hear you. They don't want to hear opposing points of view; they only want to hear their side.

I may disagree with what they have to say, but I think they have a right to say it. This is the one point that we have always wanted to get across. There are times when they're much more abusive, as they were in this instance, where they're much more open about it.

Carmen had sort of become the focal point. One of the reasons is because I think she is economically independent and can tell everybody to go to hell. She doesn't need them because they can't hurt her financially, although Jerry Brown certainly did a nice job on her by closing up her insurance company.

It's her good fortune, she wasn't that dependent on it and is able to say, take it and do what you want. She is out building a very large yacht so that she can enjoy herself as long as the Jerry Browns and the left-leaning Democrats decided they don't need her. But not everyone can enjoy that luxury, so I think a lot of people are intimidated by them. In spite of the fact that she knew in advance what they would probably do to her, and they did do it to her, she still did it. I think she's as gutsy a person as anyone I know.

Chall: Was this a meeting of the executive committee of the state central committee? I can't tell from that letter.

Schechter: I think it was an executive committee meeting.

owned by their companies. I urge every Member of this Congress to apply their best talents to the passage of this bill and to make it possible for all our people to be well-housed, rewarded by adequate return on our national forest investment, and satisfied that the forests of today will not be denuded for immediate necessity but will flourish forever.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

HON. EDWARD R. ROYBAL

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 7, 1969

Mr. ROYBAL. Mr. Speaker, the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States clearly states America's long-standing dedication to the hallowed principle of freedom of speech for all our citizens.

It is entirely appropriate that our Nation's commitment to the elemental right of free speech be contained in this first of the original 10 amendments to the Constitution—our country's "Bill of Rights"—because freedom of speech remains today, as it has been down through the years, among the basic foundations of our American democracy.

In order that a free people may continue to govern itself in freedom, it is not necessary that everyone agree with everyone else, but it is necessary that the right of all persons to express their opinions and to be heard on the vital issues of the day be respected—and that the full exercise of this right be vigorously protected.

For this reason, I was deeply concerned to receive a letter from Mrs. Hope Mendoza Schechter, president of the Democratic Women's Forum, one of the oldest and most active Democratic women's clubs in my home State of California, in which she enclosed material describing a most regrettable incident which occurred at a recent meeting in Sacramento involving a serious infringement of the right of free speech of California's Democratic National Committeewoman.

As Mrs. Schechter indicated in her enclosed open letter to fellow Democrats, it is important to us all that the "marketplace of ideas" be preserved as an arena in which differing views may be judged strictly on their merits.

Mr. Speaker, we can all join with Mrs. Schechter in her statement that "if our democracy is to mean anything, it means that persons of opposing points of view are extended the privilege to state those views."

Because of the timeliness and fundamental nature of this issue, I insert in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD the full text of the open letter from the California Democratic Women's Forum:

ACTION TAKEN AT THE APRIL 15 BOARD MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S FORUM RESULTED IN THE FOLLOWING LETTER

DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S FORUM,

Los Angeles, Calif., April 21, 1969.

DEAR FELLOW DEMOCRAT: The Democratic Women's Forum, one of the oldest and most active Democratic women's clubs in Califor-

nia, wants to express outrage at the behavior of those in attendance at a meeting held in Sacramento on the weekend of April 11. Our sense of indignation is based on two facts:

a. The Democratic National Committeewoman was subjected to verbal abuse and shouts of derision from some in the audience who apparently have no regard for the provisions of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. They had neither the courtesy nor the maturity to listen to that which our National Committeewoman had to say. No one asked that those in the audience agree with or support Carmen Warschaw's views, but if our Democracy is to mean anything, it means that persons of opposing points of view are extended the privilege to state those views. We are continuously puzzled by those who demand their right to free speech, but who are quick to interfere with the free speech rights of others.

This is all the more disturbing to us because the object of that harassment is a woman who led the liberal caucus at the Democratic National Convention in 1968 and who was appointed to help reform the Democratic Party throughout the nation to make it more responsive to and reflective of Democrats, young and old, rich and poor, and who come from all walks of life.

b. More distressing to us than the boos and catcalls which emanated from the throats of the disruptive ones was the silence of the Party leadership, who sat by and did nothing to restore order and to remind the delegates assembled that if the Party of Jefferson, Jackson, Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson stands for anything, it stands for free speech and fair play.

This abdication of responsibility is not only shameful, but dangerous.

The issue is not Carmen Warschaw. Last year it was Hubert Humphrey. In December of 1968, James Reston, Executive Editor of the New York Times, was prevented from delivering a speech at New York University. In March of 1969, Wayne Morse was the target of a continuous barrage of heckling while he attempted to speak at Riverside Church in New York.

The pattern is clear—unless those who hold leadership positions speak out against these anti-democratic forces and take effective measures to stop this growing intrusion of hoodlumism into the marketplace of ideas where views should be judged on their merits, then no one is safe.

Last year, Hubert Humphrey and James Reston. . . . This year, Wayne Morse and Carmen Warschaw. Will you be next?

Sincerely,

HOPE MENDOZA SCHECHTER,
President.

VIETNAM

HON. WILLIAM F. RYAN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 7, 1969

Mr. RYAN. Mr. Speaker, last month the press noted that the war in Vietnam had become the fourth costliest war in the history of the United States, surpassed in deaths and casualties only by the two World Wars and the Civil War. Over 34,000 American servicemen have lost their lives in the course of our military entanglement in that unhappy country. No one knows how many Vietnamese have been killed, although the estimates run to hundreds of thousands.

Twelve months have passed since the

beginning of the preliminary peace talks in Paris, and 5 months have receded since the South Vietnamese Government joined the expanded negotiations. And what progress is there to report? The killing and destruction rage on unabated; millions of American dollars continue to be expended each week in support of the war; and the urgent domestic problems which have cried out for solutions continue to multiply and fester.

Rumors of impending troop withdrawals and a deescalation in our military commitment to South Vietnam reoccur with tantalizing regularity, only to be promptly denied by Secretary of Defense Laird or some other "high administration spokesmen."

One week ago, some 250 student leaders from across the Nation—leaders of the student government and student newspapers of many of our finest universities and colleges—sent a letter to President Nixon which stated their intention to choose jail over military service so long as the war in Vietnam continued. How long will it take the administration to understand the depth of opposition to a war which the majority of our young people, in their own words, regard as "immoral and illegal"?

Historians have told us that one of the most disastrous consequences of the slaughter of World War I was the loss of a whole generation of the future leadership of France and England, a generation whose youth and vigor was sorely needed to help give direction during the critical years when Hitler was preparing for war in Europe. Had the European democracies had the benefit of that generation's perspective while Hitler was arming, historians suggest, the policies of France and England which allowed the Nazis to consolidate their military strength might have been considerably different.

I wonder if there is not a similar risk to our own future. The college students who now say they are willing to go to jail rather than participate in a war they believe to be contrary to the best ideals of this country include many young men who would normally constitute the nucleus of our future political leadership—at local, State, and Federal levels. Will this generation of student leaders assume the burdens of adult leadership for a country that is willing to turn them into criminals because they were so bold as to suggest that America has no business in Vietnam?

During the course of the Democratic primaries last spring, and indeed in the general election last fall, all of the major candidates for the Presidency agreed that the war in Vietnam had to be terminated. President Nixon himself, as early as March of 1968, said:

The next President of the United States must end the war in Vietnam.

It is time to make good on that promise. While the negotiations drag on in Paris, and the calls from the administration for "patience" reverberate, more American servicemen continue to die on the battlefields of Vietnam, and more Vietnamese civilians must bear the death

- Chall: I'm curious to know whether, on the executive committee, there would be that many people whom you would consider that far left.
- Schechter: Yes. There has been a blind spot in the Democratic party towards left wing dictators. They yell about right wing dictators, as they should, but they are silent when it comes to denouncing the U.S.S.R., Cuba, or China. All I'm saying is we attract left-wing kooks because we are the "only game in town."
- Chall: I guess what had happened is that Carmen Warschaw was then supporting Sam Yorty for mayor. Was she openly supporting Sam Yorty for mayor?
- Schechter: Yes.
- Chall: I see. Against Tom Bradley. So the people opposed her because of the stand that she took. It made no difference that she was getting up to talk about something else.
- Schechter: Yes. It wasn't really a question of Bradley. It's "the enemy camp." You had, what's his name, the national committeeman. Not Wyman.
- Chall: Stephen Reinhardt was the national committeeman.
- Schechter: Reinhardt. So, when you say anti-Bradley, you're saying anti-Reinhardt. So the candidate was really unimportant. It's who's the palace guard. And after a while, it's the palace guard that sometimes becomes more important because they're the ones who are calling the shots.
- Chall: Was Reinhardt backing Bradley, is that what you're saying?
- Schechter: Oh, yes! That was the--it wasn't pro-Yorty, anti-Bradley, or anti-Yorty, pro-Bradley, it was anti-Reinhardt, because that was his man. So even if you wanted to support Bradley you couldn't do it because of Reinhardt.
- Chall: Many people felt so strongly about Reinhardt that they would rather support Sam Yorty than they would Bradley?
- Schechter: Remember the hue and cry about Angela Davis and her getting bounced?
- Chall: Yes.
- Schechter: Would you believe that at a deposition--this is when I had my business--Steve Reinhardt asked the attorney for whom we were working [Howard Berman], "What agency are you using?" And the

Schechter: attorney said, "Schechter Deposition Service." And he [Reinhardt] went into a tirade about his using my agency. In other words, he was going to cause me to lose an account. My reporter was smart enough to start writing when she spotted what was happening, even though she was apolitical.

I wrote a letter to Steve Reinhardt, threatening him with suit for threatening my livelihood. I said I will carry it into the community and personally "will accuse you of being anti-Mexican." I was not pulling any punches. I was going to hurt him. It's like, if kicking you in the gonads is going to hurt you, buddy-boy, you're hurting me economically.

It's one thing to differ with me politically and it's another thing to hurt me economically. Angela Davis, who's way out in the left, deserves and gets the Reinhardt support. I will differ with him for other reasons. I think everyone has a right to work, regardless of whether you agree or disagree. This is what I was saying to Reinhardt. But I can keep on talking about how these people never let up if you disagree with them. They'll hurt you at every turn. They never stop, and they're vicious. They have their own "word of mouth blacklist."

I wouldn't hurt Reinhardt economically. I wouldn't go out and tell one of his important clients, why use him, he's this, he's that. And I'm sure I could certainly document the things that he has done. But why hurt him or anyone economically when it's just politically that we disagree? He has a right to disagree with me. And I have a right to disagree with him. But he has no right to hurt me. And he and his clique don't have the right to boo when someone wants to make a statement.

Chall: I see. So this is what was behind some of the hostility?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: In terms of your support for the mayor, did you support Yorty? You and whatever group you represented? From 1961 until 1973, he ran for mayor.

Schechter: No, we had a falling out. Our falling out came with the John Kennedy campaign when he endorsed Nixon. Kennedy was the presidential candidate. This is now in '60.

Chall: Catholic?

Schechter: He did something. He said something. Sam was living in the [San Fernando] valley and was going to run for Congress. This is when Jim Corman ran the first time. Corman had already asked for my support. It all happened sort of simultaneously.

Schechter: Sam and I used to be very good friends. He called me on the telephone and asked for my support. I told him I would not and why I would not. He expected me to support him for the congressional seat in the valley. I had already given my pledge of support to Jim Corman. Corman beat Yorty in the primary. Corman's political star was on the rise, he was young and if a winner, he would serve for many years as he is doing. Then Yorty came out for Nixon against JFK and that ended it for me.##

The Function of the State Central Committee

Chall: Since you were a member of the executive committee of the state central committee for so many years, I'd like your analysis of some of the leaders like Roger Kent--you have the list--were some of them stronger than others? Or more able than others?

Schechter: Roger Kent was in office during the time that George Miller was still alive. George Miller was a very active person in spite of the fact he was an elected official. I would say that Roger Kent was more George Miller's puppet. Even though Kent may have had the title, Miller was calling the shots.

You'd see him out in the audience moving his head one way or the other. He was calling the shots. Roger Kent was certainly affluent and independent, and independently could have called his own shots. But I guess they were just part of the same clique.

Chall: Since some of the most difficult times for the party came between 1965 and 1968 while Charles Warren, Bob Coate, and Roger Boas were chairmen, how did they differ in your estimation? Were any of them strong chairmen?

Schechter: I know Charles Warren was not. Boas, of course, was up north. When you have a northern chairman, they tend to stay in their own bailiwick and they sort of ignore the south.

Chall: Aren't the executive meetings for everybody?

Schechter: For everybody. But if your chairman is in the north, then that's where the activity revolves. It's centralized in the north. They forget the one thing we've always said is that the votes are down here.

Chall: And Eugene Wyman, when he was chairman?

Schechter: Eugene Wyman left us a beautiful deficit. Since his term of office, you now have to pay in advance for everything because he left so many bills. I don't know why he got that title about being such a fantastic fund raiser, because we had to pay off all the bills before we could even put in a phone, because even the phone was delinquent.

Gene Wyman raised money to send back East to make an impression in Washington so that he personally became very influential and very affluent. But in terms of helping the party in California, the assembly and state senate candidates, he just wasn't interested. He put on a show of support, but there was no substance to it for the local scene.

To me, after all, a party is as strong as your finance arm is, unfortunately. How else do you hire staff? How else do you provide money for candidates? Our real function is to elect Democrats. That's the way I measure it. How effective are they in terms of electing people? How effective are they? And electing means raising money, let's face it.

You have to pay for mailings. I don't have to spell it out for you what you have to do in a campaign. And this is how I measure it, and they didn't do that. Warren, Wyman, Coate, Boas didn't have the wherewithal. I mean candidates had to help them-- the reverse situation. I don't think that's right because we are appointed to help them [candidates]. I never saw them as being strong people from that standpoint. Marshalling our forces to elect people.

Chall: That's the principal job of the state central committee, then?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Whom would you rate as the strong, able party chairman according to your criteria?

Schechter: Charles Manatt.

Chall: Do you consider the party to have a responsibility on issues?

Schechter: Of course! This lays the groundwork within which we work.

Chall: How seriously are issues considered by the state central committee?

Schechter: It runs the gamut. We've won many issues in California. But years back when I started, we didn't have many of the advantages that we now have in California. We're ahead of the entire

Schechter: nation on every level whether you're talking energy, whether you're talking air pollution, whether you're talking women's rights, whether you're talking credit. These were things that were our goals at one time and we realized many of these goals.

Not that we still don't have many other problems in terms of jobs. Just last week, we trailed the national jobwise. We've unfortunately evolved into a state that, for some reason or other, seems to be discouraging business, forgetting that it's business that provides the jobs for the workers.

Chall: In the state central committee meetings, are certain divisive issues considered nowadays, let's say, as in 1971, when there was a question of reapportionment? At that meeting, the Mexican-Americans were very angry. They were angry with Unruh and they were angry with the legislators whom they felt were not helping to set up a district for the Mexican-Americans which they could feel was their own, from which they could be elected. They protested loudly and at length at that meeting. Are these kinds of divisive issues solved in any way or discussed thoroughly in the Democratic party?

Schechter: Yes they are. And at the last reapportionment, if you recall, that's the district they carved out--that George Danielson's now the congressman of. That's the district I told you about where they ran two Mexican-American candidates; so Danielson sailed in in the primary. Even where they have it carved out for them--they fought for it and they got it--they just blew it.

Chall: I see.

Schechter: So it was an issue at one time, but now that's been resolved. But they still lost it.

Chall: It was resolved by the state legislature.

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Did pressure of the kind that the Mexican-Americans, or any others, bring to a state central committee meeting have very much effect at that kind of a meeting?

Schechter: Yes. Because you're talking about people who are in your ball park. I attend all the Mexican-American caucuses. We certainly are vocal in terms of goals, issues, that we are interested in. For example, the printing of the ballots in both languages, et cetera, which was an ongoing problem, has been resolved. I

Schechter: think that if it's presented intelligently, they can, by and large, have what they want. As do the blacks. There aren't that many Orientals and yet they manage to be heard.

The Politically Stormy 1960s: The Assassinations

Chall: You went to the 1960 national convention as an observer. That's simply because it happened to be in Los Angeles?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Were you for Kennedy--

Schechter: No. I was for Johnson, but I switched to Kennedy when he won the nomination.

Chall: Were you ever a member or active in the Viva Kennedy clubs that were organized then? I guess Burt Corona was responsible for much of that.

Schechter: Yes. I was already living here, so my interest, of course, was in winning for Kennedy in this area. At that time, I was a member of MAPA, so I was financially helping them too. My family, of course, lives in East Los Angeles. They were Kennedy people. Everyone I know--I work with them but, let's face it, the bulk of my time was spent here.

Chall: I see. Did you do anything in that convention except watch?

Schechter: That's all I did there.

Chall: The next convention that you went to was in 1968 as a Robert Kennedy delegate. Were you on the delegation? That is, were you on the ballot as a delegate?

Schechter: Oh yes, I was on the ballot as a delegate.

Chall: Where were you when Johnson decided not to run again? Were you listening to the radio? Or watching television when he renounced?

Schechter: I don't remember.

I remember a traumatic situation. I was at the Ambassador the night that--

Chall: The night that he was assassinated?

Schechter: --Bobby Kennedy was assassinated, yes.

Chall: That must have been quite a traumatic experience.

Schechter: When John Kennedy died, it was like a member of the family dying. I mean when he was shot in Dallas. You just felt like you hadn't gotten over that, and then you had had Martin Luther King in '68, like April. And that was a shock. You hadn't recovered from that shock, and then it happens again. You begin to wonder what kind of a country am I living in? Where people with promise, people that you know are certainly vocalizing your feelings--the things you want accomplished--and, you know, they're just gone.

Over and above the pain, there's the disillusionment in your own country--that it can happen here. You expect it to happen in some foreign country, certainly, but not here. I have always considered America outstanding. I've done enough traveling that I want to kiss the earth when I come back to this country. Because of my activism, when something like this happens--I don't minimize anyone else's pain--but I feel like it hurts me more because I cannot understand how anything like that can happen.

I know that within my organization, the Court Reporter Association, I didn't go to their convention in Dallas because I don't ever want to go to Dallas. I couldn't understand, and I certainly wrote them a letter objecting to their having a convention in Dallas. It got to the place where they spat on Stevenson. So that they have established a pattern of being a very reactionary, undemocratic kind of a city. I'm just anti-Dallas.

Chall: What was it about John Kennedy that brought out such activism on the part of the Mexican-Americans?

Schechter: He reached out. He sort of recognized you as part of the total Democratic party. Even under Johnson. Johnson did the most and maybe went too far and too fast, but he didn't articulate it as well as Kennedy did. And maybe Kennedy had an impact on Johnson, too, because Johnson, as you well remember, didn't start out being the liberal that he turned out to be. I think maybe it was his exposure to him. He just had an appeal. He was electrifying, really, Kennedy, with the way he just....

Chall: That's John Kennedy. By the time Robert came, it was still very strong--he had a strong impact here.

Schechter: Yes.

The Democratic National Convention, 1968

- Chall: When you went to the convention, who personally were you for at that time?
- Schechter: In '68?
- Chall: Yes. There was no Robert Kennedy and the delegation was pretty well torn.
- Schechter: The mayor of Washington, D.C. I forget what his name was.
- Chall: There was [Channing] Phillips.
- Schechter: That's the one I think it was, from Washington, D.C.
- Chall: Hubert Humphrey?
- Schechter: Hubert Humphrey. Because Wyman was in charge of the Humphrey camp in California, we wanted to make sure that he didn't get more votes in California. I think we succeeded.
- Chall: On the California balloting in the delegation--the ballot I know of--McCarthy got ninety-one votes, McGovern fifty-one, Humphrey fourteen, and Phillips seventeen. This was an anti-Humphrey delegation then, is that right?
- Schechter: Anti-Wyman.
- Chall: It was anti-Wyman?
- Schechter: Just like I told you before, it's the palace guard that matters, and so it wasn't anti-Humphrey as much as it was anti-Gene. This was the rationale for not backing Humphrey at the convention.
- Chall: Is that right?
- Schechter: A carry-over from the double-cross.
- Chall: Unruh kept the delegation together to that extent, that even though they voted for a variety of candidates, one of them would not be Humphrey at that point.
- Schechter: Yes.
- Chall: I see. What do you recall of that convention? Because there was a great deal that was going on outside.

Schechter: For the first time, you had the feeling you were in Germany, in terms of the wall and the wire fences. You had a police escort in front of your bus, in back of your bus. You looked up at the buildings and there was the National Guard with the machine guns. It was a city under siege is what it was, and you really had the feeling of it being a city under siege.

It was a very unusual convention. I don't think we'll ever, hopefully, have another convention like that; never have had one before; never hope to see another like that one again, because it was so divisive. I think it's an unhappy chapter, and I think [Mayor Richard] Daley was the wrong person at the wrong time. He really added fuel to the fire. You know, the kind that means well, but says the wrong thing. Just like our former chief of police, William Parker--the foot-in-the-mouth disease kind of a thing.

My memory of that convention is that it was a torn convention. I remember [Abraham] Ribicoff up on the stage. A lot of hostility. The whole thing was just hostility from start to finish. Just based on that convention, the handwriting was on the wall that there wasn't enough time between August and November for the wounds to heal, for Humphrey to win. And that really is my memory of that convention. I remember the city workers drowning us out when we were protesting some of the Daley tactics. They literally drowned us out.

Chall: By--

Schechter: --shouting. From the galleries.

Chall: Did you come back and work for Humphrey?

Schechter: Towards the end. I came back also feeling let down, so it wasn't till the very end.

Chall: What would your choice have been? Were you for McCarthy at all?

Schechter: No. He always struck me as a gadfly and I think he proved it by his later actions. My gut reaction was not to be pro-McCarthy. Same way with McGovern. I was very unhappy with McGovern.

Chall: Why weren't you for Humphrey until the end, then?

Schechter: Because of Gene Wyman. I'm a team player. To me, the palace guard is very important. You've no idea that being for a man is meaningless. If you don't get along with the palace guard, you're never going to get in the door. You might just as well



THE VICE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON

September 14, 1968

Dear Mrs. Schechter:

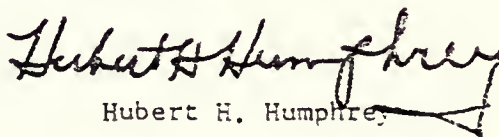
You can be justly proud of your role as a delegate to the 1968 Democratic National Convention. This Convention bestowed upon me a great honor, and I am grateful for the opportunity to lead our Party.

We Democrats faced up to some of the most difficult and controversial issues ever to come before a national convention. These issues represent the real concerns and convictions of millions of Americans. That they were brought before our convention is evidence of the Democratic Party's determination to meet the needs and demands of the people.

I know you have been pleased with the reception to Senator Muskie's nomination. The Vietnam debate was probably the most informed, intelligent and thorough debate on a crucial national issue in modern convention history. The plank agreed to by the majority calls for pursuing an early end to the war and seeking a settlement which will recognize the rights of all the people of Vietnam. Actions taken by the convention with regard to the unit rule and the selection of convention delegates will bring about needed reforms in our party structure and national conventions.

Undoubtedly, we face a major challenge in this campaign. Larry O'Brien as National Chairman and Campaign Manager means an effective and well planned campaign. I urge you to join with other Democrats in your State to work for a Democratic victory this fall from the courthouse to the White House. Senator Muskie and I are in this race to win and, with your help and enthusiastic support, I know we will win.

Sincerely,


Hubert H. Humphrey

Mrs. Hoep Mendoza Schechter
1616 Fair Oaks Avenue
Apartment No. 17
South Pasadena, California

Mrs. Hubert H. Humphrey

550 N STREET, S.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20024

December 24, 1968

Dear Mrs. Schechter:

Now that my schedule is a little more relaxed, I am glad to have the opportunity to convey to you and the other ladies of your state who participated my appreciation for the luncheon which was given in my honor at the conclusion of the campaign in Beverly Hills.

I thoroughly enjoyed attending and was grateful for the opportunity it provided to see so many of the women of your state who had given so freely of their time in behalf of the Vice President's candidacy. We are so grateful to all of you.

With our thanks and best wishes.

Sincerely,



Mrs. Hope Schechter, President
Democratic Women's Forum
417 South Hill Street
Los Angeles, California

- Schechter: be in the opposite camp, the opposite party, because you're not going to get any recognition; you're not going to get your foot in the door, no way, shape, or form. You see, the palace guard is very important.
- Chall: There was a tremendous bitterness, then. It wasn't the issue of the war, and it wasn't the issue of Johnson's stand, or Humphrey's stand on the war?
- Schechter: It was all contributing factors, but the underlying reason really was the carry-over of the palace guard, and you know who was going to be in the saddle, Gene Wyman. Or he'd win. And we'd had enough of him.

Member, National Advisory Council on the Peace Corps, 1964-1968

- Chall: Johnson had appointed you to Peace Corps Advisory--
- Schechter: National Advisory Council of the Peace Corps.
- Chall: And what did that mean? What did you do?
- Schechter: Specifically?
- Chall: Yes.
- Schechter: It was a four-year position and it was a twenty-five member board, nationally. We were in charge of deciding which countries we would aid. Each country had to agree to accepting the Peace Corps. We didn't decide we're going to send you Peace Corps; we had to sell the program to the host country and then decide in what areas, whether it was health, agriculture, or a combination of both--education, legal system, et cetera. Whatever the need was. Setting up clinics, hospitals. So it was our job not only to decide on the countries, but then follow through with the consent of the host country, manning it.

We met about three times a year in Washington, D.C. Part of our job also was to visit the host countries and watch it in operation. Because I was a full-time working person, I attended the board meetings. I never missed a single board meeting. Two times I was packed and ready to go to Puerto Rico and India and something would come up at the last minute where I, at the last minute, could not go.

PEACE CORPS

Washington, D. C. 20525

MAR 25 1964

Mrs. Harvey B. Schechter
4435 Longridge Avenue
Sherman Oaks, California


Dear Mrs. Schechter:

I want you to know that I personally appreciate your accepting President Johnson's invitation to serve on the National Advisory Council of the Peace Corps. Also, I congratulate you for the fine work you have done to merit the President's invitation. As you know, members of the Council have been most helpful to us since the Peace Corps began three years ago, and I know that your contribution will further enrich our programs.

Under separate cover, I am sending you some Peace Corps brochures and other materials which I hope you will find interesting. I look forward to hearing from you whenever I can be of assistance.

Again, I am delighted that you have joined the Peace Corps as a member of the National Advisory Council.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Sargent Shriver", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Sargent Shriver
Director

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 30, 1964

Dear Mrs. Schechter:

I am very much pleased that you are able to serve on the National Advisory Council for the Peace Corps and am glad to confirm your appointment as a member of the Council.

The success of the Peace Corps in its first years has been deeply encouraging to me, and I am confident that your role on the Council will add to the wide support in this country for the program.

It is a pleasure to know that you are willing to give your time and your energy to assuring the continued success of the Peace Corps.

With kind regards,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "Lyndon B. Johnson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mrs. Harvey B. Schechter
4435 Longridge Avenue
Sherman Oaks, California

Schechter: It was very interesting because I was sworn in at the White House --this is pre-women's lib--it was a Ladies' Day at the White House. The Marine band played all the songs that relate to women. Only women were sworn in that day. The whole thing was geared-- it reminds me now, sort of a build-up to what's happened since then. He was really conscious of women in politics.

Chall: How many women were on that Peace Corps commission?

Schechter: About half. It was sort of balanced. J. Peter Grace from the W.R. Grace Lines; Lew Wasserman from Universal Studios; the good- looking black actor, Harry Belafonte, was on it; Janet Leigh was on it; Mrs. Robert Kintner (NBC); Mrs. Albert M. Greenfield of Pennsylvania.

Only twenty-five people from around the country, and it was balanced in terms of the North, South, East and West coasts. The three from California were Lew Wasserman, Janet Leigh, and myself. We dealt with the program. Making sure that health care was provided for the Peace Corps volunteers. The training. As you well know, they had to be fluent in the language. They really were pioneers in techniques of teaching foreign languages.

##

Schechter: We also wanted to make sure that the universities and the colleges were not the only places where volunteers were recruited. We wanted to keep an open door in terms of not just college level, because there was a great need for blue collar workers. So then our job was also to inform unions and their memberships of the program so that those who wanted to participate could. We were as interested in getting blue collar volunteers as we were in college graduates. It turned out that the bulk of those who did participate were college graduates. But it may be that it was the working man who was married. If you recall, we did not allow husbands and wives, or children to go together until much later in the program when husbands and wives could volunteer.

The one exception we did make--we had to--was in the medical profession, because we just had to. The average graduate is thirty-two and is saddled with a minimum of \$5,000 debt by the time he gets through with college, with the medical profession. So we found you couldn't get the unmarried doctor. We either caught them as they graduated before they got established, or at the retiring end.

Schechter: Once in a while, you could find, let's say, a partnership of doctors, where they would give someone a leave of absence. This is one type of exception we did make. They didn't sign up for two years, but we did take them on a six month or a yearly basis, because it was more important to have medical care for the people. So you just had to be flexible. We found in the medical profession we just had to, because it was more important to provide the health care. Or training. Or providing health care even for the population, where you were teaching inoculation, setting up health programs. We would even waive the language requirement for the doctors because they didn't have the time to go into the intensive training program.

The Peace Corps had the in, up and out philosophy. You had a five year stay. You couldn't stay beyond five years. They didn't want to become a-bureaucratic kind of an agency. This is one of the things that I think kept it so dynamic, because it had fresh blood coming through it all the time that it was in operation.

Unfortunately--my husband just cut the clipping for me--that indicates really it's like on its dying legs now, in terms of funding, so it's not what it was. I really had the good fortune of serving at a time when it was sort of at its peak. I understand that under President Carter the Peace Corps is trying to make a comeback.

Chall: Whom were you advising, the executive director?

Schechter: Yes, Sargent Shriver and the staff. They would fly in the regional directors of the Peace Corps from the different countries when we had our meetings. They were rotating the regional directors, of course, because we were limited in funds. They really were a cost-conscious agency. None of this damn-the-taxpayers whatever it cost. They really meant it when they said they were trying to keep costs down and they did. It wasn't a boondoggle, in any way, shape, or form. It was really an exhilarating, dynamic agency.

Chall: The directors, then, were really concerned about setting up a program and they sought your advice, not your rubber stamp. Did you have that feeling?

Schechter: Definitely. For example, even in terms of press releases--they would send them to us. Then we, in turn, would send them out to the local press. I guess once again the cost-cutting thing, where we had access to the media and knew the community press. Well, the major metropolitan papers they knew, but even those were sent to us anyway. So we handled it from this end, too.

Schechter: We set up Peace Corps area groups too. I had one party here where I had five hundred people. Part of the recruiting involved keeping the community in touch with what was going on. Because they were a very cost conscious agency, we had to support ourselves. Edison Company donated funds. We got them to give an annual contribution, where every month they would send us so much. The telephone company helped. The Jaycees [Junior Chamber of Commerce] were very helpful. When we had functions, they would provide us with the name tags. We quickly learned. When we put on a function, we would get Lowrey's to donate some of the food. We'd get somebody else to donate the wine.

Chall: These were functions in the community to try to interest men and women in the Peace Corps?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: Its recruiting?

Schechter: Yes. And it's amazing we got a lot of help from the parents of those who were in the Peace Corps. They were all in sort of a state of shock. Their children were away from home. I never thought they'd be interested. They were thrilled that their children were doing it and, at the same time they were apprehensive. After all, they were going into a new area. They had to live as the natives did, whatever the humble accommodations were. This is the only way they could stay in touch. That's why the training program was so rigid. They really put them through a survivor kind of course like you do with boot camp training for soldiers. It really was tantamount to that kind of training.

And no discrimination whether it was male or female. The women took exactly the same training as did the men and were expected to hold their own. I mean basic--if they didn't know how to swim, they had to learn how to swim by the time they were assigned to whatever country they were going to. They never knew what was going to happen or where they were going to be sent. We very much tried to keep them in tune with the area of interest. If they were fluent in Spanish, then send them in that direction.

Frank Mankiewicz was one of the first ones who joined, and he became a director in South America. Danny Llaveano was also in it too. I forget who else in California.

Chall: Your advisory board appointment lasted just as long as Johnson's administration?

Schechter: Oh, promptly. That's why I'm so surprised with this [David] Marston thing, because the minute Nixon got elected, I got my letter of resignation for me to sign.* I never gave it a thought in terms of remaining. After all, they're in power now; it's now their ball park, and I turned in my resignation. So, I'm amazed at Marston, regardless of the smoke screen he's trying to throw up in terms of should he have been kept on. He should know better. You know, it's our ball park. It's our turn now.

Chall: The Peace Corps appointment was the major political appointment that you were able to accept.

Schechter: If you notice, there were meetings three times a year. Even though there was a claim on my time here, and it did require a lot of time, I could work it around my schedule. It wasn't one where you have to put in X number of hours, all at one stretch, as you do on commissions, or appointments that I have been offered. This was one that I could work around my schedule, other than the meetings I went to in Washington, D.C. That was the one appointment I found I could accept without it being a financial burden. For example, the last campaign I was--I know you want to get to this and it's our last night together--I was on the steering committee for Senator [Frank] Church.

Member, Steering Committee to Nominate Frank Church, 1976

Chall: Yes, I did want to.

Schechter: Initially, it was touch and go whether Jerry Brown was even going to run. Basically, we had commitments for Church from many prominent persons such as Speaker Leo McCarthy and Assembly Majority Leader Howard Berman with the understanding that if Jerry Brown entered the race, they would leave our delegation and join his.

As you know, Jerry entered the race, and we lost them and many others who had the same understanding with us. Just about the whole structure that Jerry Brown ended up with was ours.

Chall: For Church?

*David Marston, Nixon appointee, assigned to Philadelphia office of U.S. Department of Justice was opposing a request by the Carter administration that he resign this position.

Schechter: Yes. When we began with Church I was in charge of setting up the caucuses from the Tehachapis to San Diego, which then meant finding chairpersons in each congressional district, and making sure that they found a site for the caucus, and that all the newspapers were notified--sending samples of the kinds of press releases they should send out. We had no money. So we, literally, not only had to try to raise money, but we were spending our own money because we were starting rather late in that one. In that caucus, Church was also sort of a latecomer because he was holding hearings, and he also couldn't even announce until the report came through.

Then, I no sooner had that set up, when Jerry announced and I lost half of my people. Some of them had wanted appointments. Based on past history, you know very well as I do, that Jerry's position is: you're either on my team or you don't get an appointment. This happens with anyone in any campaign. So, while they were still interested in Church, opportunistically, or whatever you want, or because of other interests, they had to go on the Jerry Brown for President committee.

Then I had to pick up the pieces and start all over again, having lost half my chairpersons in each district, plus others who had promised to come to caucuses, having to now go out and find other people. It wasn't a question of just finding bodies. You now had to find a balanced one. Each registered Democrat who wanted to be a delegate to the National Democratic Convention had to file an "Intention To Run For Delegate" form stating the candidate they were supporting. This had to be filed with the County Clerk or Registrar of Voters by April 8, 1976.

Now, when you're starting rather late, it's very difficult to find people not just for an ethnic balance, but male-female distribution, et cetera. So I just hit roadblock after roadblock after roadblock. I think at the end of the year, I figured that it cost me between \$5000 and \$7000 in lost income to have been on the caucus, over and above the cost of going to Washington, D.C. for the Rules Committee meeting, and then the cost of the convention. I think this is one factor that certainly would keep a lot of people out of these kinds of activities, because of the amount of time it takes and, consequently, the personal cost to you.

Now the people who are affluent don't have to worry about these kinds of considerations, but I think that some of the rest of us certainly do. Fortunately, I was in a position where it wasn't going to break me to spend that kind of money, but it's still a healthy amount of money to spend, in one year, in one political campaign. This is not even talking about contributions I made to other campaigns.

Schechter: Last year, for example, I purposely worked extra to make up for my loss. I can't write it off. You only write off \$100 per person, as you well know. A total of \$200: I think you're allowed \$100 each.

Chall: That's not much.

Schechter: Forget it. It's like saying nothing in terms of that kind of an expense.

Chall: How did you happen to get on this steering committee for Church? Did you volunteer to somebody? Because that was a big job you took on. That's half of the state.

Schechter: It's like being a little bit pregnant. You start off by saying, "Okay, I'll be on the steering committee."

Chall: Did he pick his steering committee? Church?

Schechter: Yes. The candidate selects his chairman statewide, or at least a responsible person to start looking for people. You have to find the bodies, hold the caucuses, all within a rigid structure in terms of the date and the time for the California caucus, in this instance April 8, 1976.

A Critique of the Caucus Method of Selecting Convention Delegates

Schechter: Each state has the right, as you well know, to determine how delegates are chosen, and we in California have gone the caucus route. This is really undemocratic because what happens is, any person who wants to be a delegate, can attend a caucus and bring his clique, and be elected and never be heard from. So it has no meaning in terms of the candidate benefiting from that person being a delegate. So I think that, in the last analysis, leaving it in the hands of the candidate, to a certain extent, helps. Which means, why have a caucus? Those of us who spent so many hours working on it--and you have no idea the size of my phone bill, calling all these areas and the roadblocks--we think that the caucus is not the best system for selecting delegates.

Orange County, for example, I couldn't even get [Jerry] Patterson's office--he was a congressman, a Democratic congressman--to help me set up sites. I had to travel to Orange County. I was able to do it by phone every place else, whether it was Palm Springs, whatever, by phone. I had to drive to Orange County

Schechter: and then had to inform the school board of its rules. I know, they wanted to charge me \$92 per cafeteria or auditorium, or \$125. Ridiculous prices, when the law clearly states that they cannot charge if it's open to the public--and it was; it's not a closed session. They couldn't charge me. I had to call the city attorney and have the board of education informed that they were illegal in trying to charge me.

Chall: So it was almost a full time job for several people.

Schechter: It was.

Chall: Did you give up your work?

Schechter: I stopped. I did very little work. Because I had a time limit, and always, if I commit myself to do something, I will do it. I may never want to do it again. I'm committed and I'm going to do it. And I finished it, and we got the job done. But I really don't believe that the caucus is the way to do it. It's subject to change, so while it still exists at the present time, the way that we do it--I think that all those involved in all of the caucuses have pretty much reached a consensus that the caucus is not the way to do it.

Chall: What method would you use to choose delegates? I guess you know how it has been done in the past.

Schechter: Yes, it had been done, and I think it still holds merit, that those that are involved in politics, certainly know which people are going to be the ones that would be responsible persons to put on a delegation in terms of people who are the activists, in terms of balancing it. That's one route to go. The other one is, well, you do run as a caucus. There are several ways that it can be done.

Chall: In the past, when ten or eleven people would sit in a room and decide on the delegation, they were not balanced too much by race and not too much, certainly, by sex.

Schechter: But they weren't any place. What has happened is because of the strong movement towards equal representation--I don't really like to use the word quota--there is an understanding that there should be some representation of different groups. For example, the McGovern race. I'll never forget attending their caucus once the convention as a whole voted that the McGovern delegation was the one that was going to represent California. To be democratic, they threw all the names in a hat. But what happened was, once they picked one white male, that was it. If they picked another name out of the hat and it was another white male, they just set it aside, just threw it aside. It's ridiculous.

Chall: Weren't there caucuses for McGovern in every--

Schechter: No, no, I'm talking about already in Miami. When the national convention--remember you did not have proportional representation, but Humphrey was there with a certain number of delegates who wanted to be on the California delegation in proportion to their vote in the primary?

Chall: Oh yes.

Schechter: Then the convention as a whole voted that the McGovern delegation was the one that would be seated.

Chall: Were you there? As a delegate?

Schechter: I was there as a page in order to have floor privileges. No, I didn't want to get on. I could have. It's not hard to get on any delegation. Really, it is not. All you have to do is show up at a meeting. Since I know people, it's just not hard to get on.

Chall: You would have gotten on?

Schechter: I could have gotten on.

Chall: So you were there. You saw that struggle about whether you were going to have all or part of the California delegation?

Schechter: I think it's good, for example, that unless you have fifteen percent of the votes, you don't have any of the representation.

Chall: Yes, that would be a change.

Schechter: No, that is in effect now.

Chall: I see. Then the problem is of balancing that according to race, sex and all that?

Schechter: Yes.

Chall: It presents a real problem then, in picking delegates.

Schechter: Yes, it does. It's left in the hands of the steering committee. There are so many proposals in terms of which route to go and which is the most democratic way, but I don't see that the caucus has worked in terms of meaningful representation.

Democratic National Conventions--Looking Ahead

- Chall: When you were on the Rules Committee, the 1976 Democratic convention, were you the co-chairman of the Rules Committee?
- Schechter: Yes.
- Chall: And who was the chairman?
- Schechter: Martha Griffiths, the congresswoman.
- Chall: Two women?
- Schechter: No, it was balanced. There was a black gal; I know there were three men and three women.
- Chall: So it was one and one.
- Schechter: Yes, one and one--who were co-chairmen.
- Chall: The committee chair group--it was made a little bit larger--at the top.
- Schechter: Make it larger and of more equal representation, ethnically, et cetera. Why don't you ask me some questions while I look for something. [Rules Committee list]

The Question of Equality for Women

- Chall: Was one of the main problems on the Rules Committee having to do with equal division of delegates, that is, the fifty-fifty rule for women? Was that one of the major problems that you encountered?
- Schechter: Yes, and it ended up in the Rules Committee. They were counting heads and realized that to take a vote and lose would be a step backward. And they didn't want to do it, which I think was smart. Because then you're on record. This way, you can still go back to the next convention and fight it out, and maybe then it's a better climate. But the climate was such that they weren't going to win, and so they intelligently didn't force it into a vote on the floor because they didn't have the votes. And that was the overriding consideration on that.

From the Report of the
1976 Committee on Rules

1976 Rules Committee Officers

Martha Griffiths, Chairwoman

Co-Chairpersons

Theo Mitchell
Richard Samuels

Hope Mendoza Schechter
Janet Watlington

Staff to the Rules Committee

Laird Harris, Executive Director
Howard Gamser, Chief Counsel
Hugh Cannon, Parliamentarian
Ruth Streeter, Administrative Assistant
Charles Wick, Jr., Staff Assistant
Susan Seyfarth, Staff Assistant
Diana Gamser, Volunteer

DNC Coordination

Mark Siegel, Executive Director

*To be voted
there*

Section 2. Resolved further that the substance of the following language shall be included in the By-laws: that state affirmative action plans include a specific plan to help defray the expenses of those delegates otherwise unable to participate in National Conventions or Conferences and that the Democratic National Committee provide all necessary aid to carry out this resolution.

amending
Section 3. Resolved further that, consistent with the traditions of the Democratic Party, the Call to future National Conventions shall promote equal division between delegate men and delegate women from each state or territory. The implementation of this goal shall rest with each state party.

Section 4. Resolved further that the Democratic National Committee convene a National Party Conference in 1978. This resolution is "otherwise designated" within the meaning of Article 12, section 2 (ii) of the Charter.

Section 5. Resolved further that this Convention, recognizing the Responsibility of our National Party to provide for our Presidential nominating process, urges the U.S. Congress to refrain from intervening in these Party affairs unless and until the National Party requests legislative

Chall: The Rules Committee itself, though, had voted against the fifty-fifty rule?

Schechter: Yes. And I voted for it.

Chall: Did you vote for the requirement that women must be allotted fifty percent of the delegate seats or that the convention work toward an equal division?

Schechter: I voted for the convention to work toward equal division of seats. We attended their caucuses and I think it was the day that it was going to come up to a vote that they counted heads and realized that they didn't stand a chance.

Chall: What did you think of the way the women conducted themselves on this issue?

Schechter: I think they conducted themselves very well. Each time you plow new ground, because you don't have the same men attending or the same women attending, so it's a process of education. And many of them come from states where, traditionally, women have not had recognition. Where you have a problem with ERA, you know, you're talking Louisiana or some of the other states where we still don't have it. So it's an ongoing educational process, and maybe next time they'll be able to prevail.

Chall: Would you be in favor of that one particular requirement in a delegation, that it be fifty-fifty in every state?

Schechter: You know, it's a sad commentary, that you have to state are you for it, because it really, in a Democratic party, should never even be a problem. But as long as we are faced with that kind of a problem, maybe we should set some kind of goal. Although I think we've raised such a hue and cry about it that there will be greater effort. I know, once again coming from California, this state sort of leads everyone else, where you do have it. There's no problem in this state getting it because we're a little noisier.

Chall: But prior to that, there were rarely more than about--

Schechter: Oh, of course.

Chall: --fourteen, fifteen percent.

Schechter: You were lucky.

Chall: [chuckles] I see. So that's at least one area where you think a quota might be needed.

Schechter: As much as I don't like quotas.

Chall: What do you think about it in terms of minorities, of people who are old, and people who are young--

Schechter: --or handicapped.

Chall: --handicapped, yes.

Schechter: Here we are, co-chairpersons of the Rules Committee. I was wrong in terms of the numbers. It's two and two.

Chall: I see, there were four.

Schechter: Yes.

The Question of Representation of Other Groups in American Society

Chall: I may want to take this and copy it and send it back to you. It's easier that way.

What about all the other types of people that we have in our society. Can we set up a delegation or convention in which everyone has some kind of representation? This is what the caucus strives to do, doesn't it?

Schechter: Yes, yes.

Chall: But you're thinking that it would be better to pick people who represent these various groups, not according to whether they show up with a clique behind them, but whether they are activists in the party, and are recognized as such? Is that your distinction?

Schechter: Yes. And if you've noticed, the handicapped have really come a long way in terms of organizing themselves. This week, for the first time, I received material from the Gray Panthers, nationally. I know one lady who is chairman of a Gray Panther group here, so I'm aware that they are organized and that they are making their views known. But for the first time, in all the years I've been active in politics, I got material from them. I imagine you got it, too.

Chall: Yes, for awhile about every two months, I received a Gray Panther mailing.

Schechter: I had never even seen one. But whether you talk gays, whether you talk Gray Panthers, there's this boiling thing that's bringing it to the surface, all of a sudden. I don't think that any Democratic convention will, from here on in, ignore the different interests, whether it's ethnic or whatever the other areas may be.

Chall: There will always be somebody representing that interest group?

Schechter: Yes. And I know that whether we go the caucus route or not, that each will have to have some representation. At this point we have to live with the caucuses, and I'm saying that the caucus will have to keep in mind that, whatever delegates it works with, it's going to have to be a balanced and representative one in terms of age, male, female, ethnicity. I'm really being very honest when I say I don't know that we could ever possibly go to a convention anymore and be seated unless we're a representative group.

I'm not saying that in some areas it won't be difficult. You'll have less, but at least you'll have a token representation, where in the past you had none. I don't think anyone dares come to a convention anymore without it.

Chall: Do you think that will strengthen the convention? That that will do any good, or make it any different in terms of who are selected as presidential and vice-presidential candidates? Do you think that's where it will be done? If ever it was. That it will matter?

Schechter: I think so. We still have tight pockets in different states.

The Coming Influence of the Spanish-Speaking Population

Schechter: Here you have a heavy influx of Mexican-Americans. I don't know if you're aware of it, but it's the fastest growing minority group and will, before too long, even nationally, outstrip the black. Till now the black has been the largest.

California, if you notice your school patterns--the L.A. schools are already outnumbered, all schools, by Mexican-Americans, by the Latinos. You have Puerto Rican, Mexican-American, Cuban population. About two years ago, I had a reception when the new consul from Israel arrived. Zvi Brosch. It's very unusual. They had never established a liaison with the Spanish-speaking community. Once you're talking about the entire Los Angeles community, you have to stop saying Mexican-Americans and shift gears.

Schechter: So that I had about 120 people to meet him. I geared it primarily to professionals in all the news media--Latin. And I had Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexican-Americans, all the press, radio, TV, professionals, teachers, judges, attorneys, across the board.

I introduced Zvi and I introduced him in Spanish, just to give it a feel for us Latinos. He spoke no Spanish. Everyone was bilingual here, so there was no problem in terms of their understanding him. I just wanted to keep the theme thing going and I served just Mexican hors d'oeuvres. Everything I served was Mexican: chiles con queso, margueritas, you know, this kind of a thing. It worked out very nicely in terms of making those present aware of the Israeli consulate's office and sensitizing the Israeli consul to the large community, which is growing tremendously. I tried to place the Consul General in a Spanish-speaking environment and have them see him in such a setting.

He did make one promise and that was that he was going to learn Spanish. I think that Israel will eventually have to make sure that their consul person in the Southwest will have to be a Spanish-speaking person. Everyone's going to have to do this.

Transcribers: Marilyn Ham and Marie Herold
Final Typist: Marie Herold

Guide to Tapes -- Hope Mendoza Schechter

Interview 1: January 12, 1977	1
tape 1, side A	1
tape 1, side B	12
Interview 2: March 20, 1978	25
tape 2, side A	25
tape 2, side B	38
insert from tape 5, side A	50
tape 3, side A	59
tape 3, side B	71
tape 4, side A	82
tape 4, side B	94
Interview 3: March 21, 1978	107
tape 5, side A	107
tape 5, side B	111
tape 6, side A	121a
tape 6, side B	132
tape 7, side A	145
tape 7, side B	153

INDEX -- Hope Mendoza Schechter

Alinsky, Saul, 76-78, 86-87
 Arywitz, Sigmund, 41-42

Belafonte, Harry, 153
 Berman, Howard, 97, 131
 B'nai B'rith, 136-137
 Bradley, Tom, 143
 Bravo, Francisco, 117-118
 Brown, Edmund G. Sr. (Pat), 44-45
 and California Democratic State Central Committee, 122, 129
 and Mexican-American community, 116-119
 Brown, Edmund G., Jr. (Jerry), 117-118, 156-157
 Brown, George, 132
 Brown, Rudd, 139

Calderon, Richard, 96
 Castro, Raul, 115
 Chavez, Cesar, 113-115
 Church, Frank
 1976 presidential campaign, 156-158
 Clifton, Susie, 42
 Committee on Political Education (COPE)
 Central Labor Council, 44-45
 Community Relations Conference of Southern California, 72-74
 Community Service Organization (CSO), v-viii, 14, 71-87, 113
 Crotty, John, 36

Davis, Grace Montañez, 111-112
 DeBonzo, Consuelo, 116
 Democratic national conventions
 (1968), 150-152
 (1972), 159-160
 (1976), Rules Committee, 161-163
 Democratic party (California), 120-132
 Democratic Women's Forum (1968-1971), 137-141
 liberal faction, 142-145
 state central committee, 43, 120-132
 executive committee, 133-135, 145-147
 women's division, 135-137
 women, leadership in, 120-132

Democratic party (national)
 caucus selection of national convention delegates, 158-161
 women, representation, 161-163

Despol, John, 44

Douglas, Helen Gahagan, 140

Equal Rights Amendment, 68

Estrada, Catalina, 90

Finch, Robert, 16

Ford, John Anson, 79

Galarza, Ernesto, 112-113

Garcia, Alex, 127

Graves, Richard, 134

Greenfield, Mrs. Albert, 153

Griffiths, Martha, 161

Guzmán, Ralph, 76

Holifield, Chet, 59-62, 123

Howser, Frederick, 44-46

Independent Progressive Party, 142

Institute of Industrial Relations, UCLA, 69-70

International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), 29-66

Johnson, Lyndon B., 148-149

Kash, Kaygey, 136

Kennedy, John F., 148-149

Kent, Roger, 145

Kinter, Mrs. Robert, 153

Knight, Goodwin, 45

Lane, Harold, 59-61

League of United Latin American Citizens, 75

Leigh, Janet, 153

Leshin, Gerry, 66

Levy, Abe, 41-42

Littauer Fellowship, Harvard University, 34-37

- Lockheed Aircraft Company, 27-30
- Los Angeles County, California
 Chavez Ravine public housing issue, 63-66
 mayoral campaign (1969), 141-145
- McCarran-Walters Act, 60-61
- McKinstry, Lois, 66
- Manatt, Charles, 146
- Martinez, Vilma, 112
- Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), 93-96
- Mexican Americans, California
 agricultural laborers, 113-115
 barriers to economic and social advancement, 81-90
 community organization, 14-16, 71-97
 leaders, 111-116
 discrimination against
 in employment, 29, 37-38
 in housing, 18
 in schools, 5-16
 by Los Angeles County Police, 80
 education, 84-90
 immigration problems, 59-61, 92-93
 influence, 164-165
 media (newspapers, radio), 90-92
 politics, 93-97
 relations with California governors, 116-119
- Mexican-Americans, San Antonio, Texas, 115-116
- Miller, George, Jr., 125, 145
- Munnell, William L., 43, 121-123, 126-127
- Nava, Julian, 96, 117-118
- O'Brien, George, 125
- Olivarez, Graciela, 115
- Peace Corps (National Advisory Council for the Peace Corps), 152-156
- Project Head Start, 14-16, 84-85
- Reagan, Ronald, 117
- Reinhardt, Stephen, 143-144
- Rosenthal, William, 45
- Ross, Fred, 78, 86-87
- Roybal, Edward, v-viii, 14, 47-48, 74, 79-80, 127
- Ruiz, Tony, 67-68

Salinger, Pierre, 130
 Samario, Carlos, 15
 Schechter, Hope Mendoza
 business, court reporter agency, 100-106
 education, 5-14, 23-24, 99-100
 Littauer Fellowship, Harvard University, 34-37
 employment
 garment industry, 26-28
 Lockheed Aircraft, 27-30
 ILGWU staff, 32-69
 family background, 1-24, 97-99
 first marriage, 19, 50
 second marriage, Harvey Schechter, 101-102, 106-111
 National Advisory Council on the Peace Corps, (1964-1968), 152-156
 political activities, Democratic party, 42-48, 120-163
 Shriver, Sargent, 154
 Siegal, Paul, 121
 Sillas, Herman, 97
 Snyder, Elizabeth, 42-43, 120-126, 133-135

 Teran, Carlos, 14
 Travis, Alice, 121

 Ulene, John, 41

 Van Nord, Gertrude, 36
 Villaescusa, Henrietta, 115

 Warren, Charles, 145-146
 Warschaw, Carmen, 120, 126-133, 141-143
 Wasserman, Lew, 153
 women in the labor movement (ILGWU), 48-49, 62-68
 women in politics
 attitudes towards, 20-21
 in Democratic party politics, 120-141, 161-163
 Wyman, Eugene, 126-129, 145-146, 150-152
 Wyman, Rosalind, 64

 Yorty, Samuel, 121a-122, 141-145
 Youth Opportunities Foundation, 15, 82, 88-89

Malca Chall

Graduated from Reed College in 1942 with a B.A. degree, and from the State University of Iowa in 1943 with an M.A. degree in Political Science.

Wage Rate Analyst with the Twelfth Regional War Labor Board, 1943-1945, specializing in agriculture and services. Research and writing in the New York public relations firm of Edward L. Bernays, 1946-1947, and research and statistics for the Oakland Area Community Chest and Council of Social Agencies 1948-1951.

Active in community affairs as a director and past president of the League of Women Voters of the Hayward Area specializing in state and local government; on county-wide committees in the field of mental health; on election campaign committees for school tax and bond measures, and candidates for school board and state legislature.

Employed in 1967 by the Regional Oral History Office interviewing in fields of agriculture and water resources, Jewish Community history, and women leaders in civic affairs and politics.





